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BY

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AUTHOR OF

"THE SEASON," "THE HUMAN TRAGEDY," "AN ARTIST'S PROOF," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

1866.

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LONDON:
PRINTED BY C. WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

Getting into Position 1

CHAPTER II.

English Neighbours 37

CHAPTER III.

This Picture and That 81

CHAPTER IV.

A Rapid Retrospect 111

CHAPTER V.

Hand in Hand 141

CHAPTER VI.

A Tenant at Will 170

CHAPTER VII.

A Modern Favourite 195

CHAPTER VIII.

PAGE

IMPORTANT TRIFLES 230

CHAPTER IX.

A WAITING GAME 261

WON BY A HEAD.

CHAPTER I.

GETTING INTO POSITION.

You would not have known that you were in a London house. Upon entering it, you looked for the staircase in precisely the direction in which it did not stand; you thought you had passed through the hall, when to your surprise you turned into another; and just as you expected to ascend and find your hostess awaiting you in a square or oblong drawing-room on an upper story, a door was suddenly thrown open and you were shown into a chamber, all

angles and corners, upon the ground floor. Nor did its contents, any more than its approach, answer to the conventional anticipations with which one enters a metropolitan salon. Without being an upholsterer, you saw at a first glance that large expenditure of money had not given to it its peculiarities; and without boasting any extraordinary amount of critical refinement, you saw at a second that it was indebted for its charm to good taste, and that good taste the taste of a woman. It had but one opening to the light, but this monopolised one entire end of the room, and gave upon a verandahed balcony, which, dressed with flowering plants, looked down upon a miniature garden scrupulously kept and hemmed in by thriving trees. Surely Babylon is nowhere near? Listen. In vain will you strive to catch through the foliage a treacherous glimpse of steeple or chimney-stack. But that indefinite homogeneous hum that never swells or swoops, but never ceases, can be and is no

other than the Babel of the many-footed town.

Its usual society was, no more than its arrangement, in accordance with the average pattern of the English capital. You have now an excellent opportunity for forming its acquaintance and your own judgment, as this very moment some half-dozen men, with the laughter provoked by the last joke of the wine-flask still upon their lips, break in upon some half-dozen women, whose fewer and milder jokes have already been fully expended.

Do not be too anxious to follow that tall, good-looking fellow, who, with just a glance, unnoticed by all but herself, at by far the handsomest woman in the room, goes straight to a corner of the balcony where leans a slim figure, whose face we cannot see, but whose fair hair, from necessity or choice, has been cut so short as, though perfectly free, not to trespass beyond the imaginary line which divides neck from shoulder. Let

him go. It is his habit to please himself and single out for selfish converse whoever most attracts him. You shall see more of him and his choice a little later. For the present, take up the glance that he threw, in passing, at that lovely woman with all the virtues of a statue united to all the virtues of the flesh, and keep it for a time fixed attentively upon her. She is the lady of the house, though you would not think it, to see her splendidly sitting and calmly waiting to be entertained by any of her guests, male or female, who should next offer to undertake that pleasant office. She is, take her all in all, one of the finest-looking women you ever saw. She must be a duchess, at least. No, she is not. She is plain Mrs. Narracott. Her father was a celebrated optician, a very scientific person, but a gentleman of yesterday, having nothing to do with the cream of the cream, not even being the blue milk immediately below it, but quite new milk altogether; perhaps with capacities there-

fore of producing cream, and this his daughter may, forsooth, be the product. That privileged guest who walked past her to the balcony, takes upon himself sometimes to call her Countess, and her husband is falling rapidly into the habit after him; but that is nothing more than the banter of this peculiar circle. How very agreeable it must be to talk with her! for, without abating one line of her exquisite repose, her eyes and mouth have all the mobility necessary for female animation, and now and then her pretty neck arches with dignified roguery, and her pretty hands are raised an inch or two in malicious surprise. As great a man as a modern artist can be is talking to her now. Griffon, R.A., you would pass in the street without looking at; and in a room he does not obtrude himself upon your notice. He has, to those who know how to note such things, an air of quiet humoristic observation. He knows his own value, yet thinks very highly of his art and very meanly

of himself. Exteriorly he is not retiring, but very modest in reality. He made both mark and money very early in life, and is now in the best years of manhood. He has a wife and a large family, and is thoroughly happy among them. He is, withal, very young-hearted, and often, as to-day, affects the bachelor, and has a merry mania for warning men for whom he cares, against being married.

"Our baronet is struck with the fast young authoress," he is saying to Mrs. Narracott. "Do you think he is fool enough ever to dream of marrying *her?*"

"He might dream of it," she answers; "but be quite sure that he will wake before he does it."

"Ah! but when young fellows go standing upon balconies."

"I should think Sir Everard has been standing on balconies half his life."

"Well, you ought to know better than I do," and he gave her a look of playful im-

putation, which she met with a quiet bend of the head and a smile, implying that she cheerfully accepted it. "Still, a man is never safe. Look at me! I never intended to marry, but I did, and now I've a dozen of 'em, as near as possible, to paint for."

"And a poor lost miserable creature you would have been if you had not married."

"I never should have worked, if I had not, that's true; but what good have I done by working? But Delafosse is not going to work, whether he marries or not. The world will never get much work out of him."

"Don't you be too sure of that, though you cannot be too sure that Sir Everard is not going to marry Rosie Raffles, or anybody else—without *my* permission. . . . Now, I know you want to smoke, and I will be generous. Go and join those barbarians."

Some of those "barbarians" had descended into the little garden and had already filled the summer night with the trail

of their cigars. Three of them, who were also smoking, were in noisy converse at the other end of the balcony to that where, very close to each other, and anything but noisy, still stood the two figures who had paired so early. The fumes of the tobacco might or might not invade the drawing-room; that was an affair of the wind, about which nobody concerned himself. Nor did anybody concern himself as to whether those half-dozen women would like to be talked to. That one sex ought to be as well able to amuse itself and hold its own as the other, appeared to be the silently accepted opinion. And since they had not yet arrived, and probably never would arrive at the full profanity of smoking actually within the drawing-room, those who chose to remain under its shelter had to pay the penalty, if it was one, of temporary masculine absence. At every turn, and in every incident, you saw a circle where "the proper thing" was utterly ignored. There was a piano in the room, it is

true, but nobody was asked either to play or sing, and "a little music" was entirely banned. Yet let decorum be consoled. With the exception of the hostess, and perhaps—for as yet it would be premature to give an opinion — the young lady with the slim figure and the undulating short fair hair, none of the women provoked, or would have supported, description. They were not original, yet they were not made to order. They walked out of the ordinary paths without leading you anywhere else. It is a dangerous thing on the mere score of social effect, for even a woman of genius to disregard the recognised trivialities of behaviour. When an ordinary woman disregards them, she simply unsexes herself without obtaining the slightest compensation. Polished conventionality is the saving clause in the constitution of common-place people.

"There is only one opinion about it, Montagu," was being said by Knightsbridge, of whom exceptionally it may be asserted that

he was a gentleman, not only on the stage, but off it; "everybody likes, and everybody praises it."

"Yes, I think I've done the trick this time," answered Narracott, raising his arms and shoulders simultaneously, as though he wanted, as the phrase is, to pull himself together—a gesture which you could not be five minutes with the man without perceiving to have grown part of his personality; "I've done it this time. The third edition is out on Saturday, and even this ruffian, Marston Light, condescends to review it favourably."

The "ruffian" alluded to was one of the jolliest and best-natured looking men in London, and one might have wondered how he managed not to be drowned in the human kindness with which his appearance overflowed. But his voice told a different tale; and, could common repute be relied on, Marston Light was one of the most cynical, selfish, ill-tongued, cruel-penned litterateurs

of the town. Somebody said of him that he had read the Sacred Scriptures as hastily as the books which he reviewed, and that he had in consequence totally misunderstood the divine admonition, and invariably did to his neighbours what he took precious good care they should never do to him.

"I dared not review it otherwise," he replied, turning to Knightsbridge, for he always talked as to an audience, and expected every word he uttered to tell somewhere, "for Narracott has ensconced himself both in the 'Afternoon Siesta,' and the 'Monthly Mixture,' and hits back with usurious interest at any frank scribe who hesitates dislike. But the novel is really first rate. Poor Rosie Raffles! she can neither ensure such encomium, nor strike out when she is fiercely stricken."

"They say *you* wrote that notice in the 'Papercutter,'" interrupted Knightsbridge.

"They lie," Light answered, briefly. "Whoever wrote it, she seems comforted at

present. A good-natured baronet easily consoles a young woman for an ill-natured critic. Look at 'em!"

"The rapidity of your work astounds me," Delafosse was saying.

"But then it is so poor and superficial," she answered meekly, then adding, with pathetic inflection on the words: "so different from yours!"

"Well, it is." Then, probably perceiving that his answer might unfortunately be taken to apply to the latter as well as to the former part of her remark, he was forced to add: "it *is* comparatively poor and superficial." He did not choose to accept the compliment paid to himself; but he repeated the derogatory criticism upon herself with the frankest calmness. "Then since you know that it is superficial, why not try to do something better?"

"Can I, do you think?"

"I cannot tell, though I should be inclined to hope so, at any rate. You know

I have never read more than your first novel, which your publisher sent me; and that is one more than I read of most people. Of your last and—you wrote another, a second, did you not?"

"Yes; the last is my third."

"I know nothing of either. Can you give them a better character than the first, or are they also poor and superficial?"

"I fear so."

"Then I am not to read them?"

"No. But tell me—do you, from what you read of the first, encourage me to try to do something better?"

It was a very interesting face, though beautiful, or even pretty, it could not be considered. It was too irregular to be the first, and too earnest to be the second. Perhaps it was only this, its earnestness, that made you doubt, when you were told that she was but five-and-twenty. The foreheads of even very capable women are never ploughed into ridges, as are men's, by preparatory

thought, and hers was no exception. It was broad enough, but very smooth, and her eyebrows seemed traced more by the soft hands of the toilet-table than the rough processes of the laborious study. Her nose was rather delicate, but it had an undulating line that asserted her right to some share in the fanciful faculty. The jaws swept suddenly round as if in haste to meet at a sharp protuberant chin; and this, with an eloquent-seeming, but outward-lipped mouth, gave her a strange sort of hungry look, as though she terribly wanted something, though what it was there was nothing to instruct you. She had lovely little ears; and the way in which the silky hair went rippling back behind them gave her the one thing, and the only thing, which could really be called fascinating.

Unless her voice were deemed such, and that depended entirely on the listener. Such a deep voice, soft and round enough withal, somewhat reminding you of the first

notes of an organ when touched very gently. There was a crescendo character about it, and yet it never rose, maintaining ever that deep even tone which, like the combined expression of the mouth and chin, seemed to speak of a soul inordinately but vaguely hungry.

Could there have been contrast to her voice greater than was his? A wandering voice, now in this key, now in that, full of musical possibilities. For a moment it would be deeper, ever so far deeper, than hers, but only in temporary and appropriate accompaniment to his words. It shifted with his language, shifted as his eyes or hands shifted, obedient to what he wanted it to say. He had neither laughed nor sighed whilst talking to her, and they had talked as people talk who do not particularly wish to be overheard. But had you listened, you would have been sure that his voice could have rung and rippled with merry mad laughter, or interpreted the troubles of the heart by the notes of "the pathetic minor."

"Do you encourage me to try to do something better?" she had just asked. "Mr. Narracott, who is very kind to me, would have me do something that I think worse. He says I am not cautious and conventional enough, that I do not consider my public or conciliate my critics and the circulating libraries sufficiently. Now, if I were to try to do what I consider better, I should conciliate less, and, I suspect, offend very much more."

She pushed her curls just a hair or two's breadth farther behind her little ears, threw back her head till it almost rested on her neck, and looked up, in the broken moonlight, to his face. He was so much taller than she, and his eyes were therefore so far off, that she could gaze up at them as though she were gazing at the stars. They were very near each other, and her fawning manner made it appear, or feel, at least, that they were still nearer than they really were. Considering women's immense natural ad-

vantages, upon my word they use them with astounding moderation.

Did he encourage her to try to do something better? As Mrs. Narracott had said to Griffon, Sir Everard Delafosse had spent pretty nearly half his yet young life on balconies, and had been in the moonlight often enough before to-day with maidens who wanted to be encouraged to do something better. But he would have been harder than that flint which we are assured, in spite of its being such, can be rent, if he had not given the uplooking petitioner the benefit of every doubt.

"Yes, I would encourage you, though with a certain amount of hesitation. I know but one of your books, and you only—for dinner goes for nothing (you saw *I* was outside the conversation all the time) — and you only for the first time, these last ten minutes. Now, Montagu—pardon me, I cannot get into the way of calling him anything else—Montagu has probably read all

your books, and knows you—does he not?—pretty intimately?

"Yes. He has known me some time."

"Again, he is well acquainted with the taste of the public, because he has long considered and consulted it. I am completely ignorant of it, inasmuch as I never consult or even consider it at all. His advice and mine are sure to clash, supposing that I think highly enough of your powers to advise you. But his will be sound advice, and certainly safe. Mine may be not only dangerous, but fatal."

"You are not encouraging me, now, Sir Everard. You are talking on the very supposition that my only chance of continued success lies in meeting my public half way and propitiating my audience, and that the moment I tried to get an audience for myself as myself, I should not be strong enough to retain what I have already got. That is what Mr. Narracott says. He threatens me with losing my present public, unless, to use his words, I mend my manners. But you!"

"I see," he said, slightly shifting his position and smiling, "that you are determined I should encourage you. Montagu is the best fellow in the world, and we are sworn allies; but no two men could look at things with more different eyes. You have had his advice; you shall now have mine, or rather my opinions, since I do not feel justified in advising you till I am better acquainted with your strength. But supposing that you are strong, I should in that case say to you, never think of your public at all. Let not such a thing as a circulating library ever enter your head. Give general opinion the go-by. Do not fly in its face: do not even look in its face. There is no necessity for you, as an artist, to be acquainted with it, any more than with the shape of the last new bonnet, or the fulness of the last new skirt. Write your book out of yourself, and leave it. If the public likes it, good. If the public does not like it, equally good—perhaps, better. Follow my advice, and

run the risk, still supposing that you are really strong, of ending by not having above a couple of hundred readers, until after the last Church Service has been drawled over you, and very likely not then. Now, you know what my encouragement amounts to."

She had kept her head thrown back and still, the whole time he spoke, and had been staring earnestly with her steady grey eyes up into his face. When he finished, she said with a voice, deeper and more hungry-sounding even than before:

"But *do* you think I am strong?"

He answered with judicial calmness:

"Very few people are, even of those who fancy themselves so, or of those who really wish to be so. Therefore the odds are considerably against you." The conversation had been maintained too long at a serious pitch; and, had she known him better, she might have been sure that a little banter was coming. "But if"—and his face melted into playfulness—"if you want to

solve the problem, you could not do better than plant yourself, alone, in some abandoned wilderness or other, and stay there till you have written the most truthful thing that it is in you to write. In London, you can forget neither your audience nor yourself."

"And where is there such a wilderness?" she asked, a little puzzled to know whether he were laughing at her, or his pleasantry were only earnestness out of harness.

"In heaps of places. There is just such a one on my estate; a cottage held by an old woman, who says she is over a hundred, and is certainly not much under it, and who will probably live a hundred years more."

"Everard!"

"What is it, old boy?"

"Come and see me, Sir Everard."

"Where? in the howling wilderness? But I said you were to be alone."

"No: here in town. You know my address?"

"No I don't."

"Everard!"

"Yes, old boy!"

"That is it! You will come? Come on Monday."

"Confound the fellow! We shall never get him off that girl. Let us try another influence. . . . Miss Raffles, I am told that Marston Light wrote that pleasant notice of you in the 'Papercutter.'"

"Did he?" she answered, without stirring from the balcony. "Then he is a monster."

Delafosse had tried to move, but his companion still managed to detain him. Narracott and the other two men came nearer, discussing the review that had just been named. On hearing what was the subject of their talk, Delafosse no longer manifested any desire to stir. But as, though himself not moving, he made no especial efforts to enthral his companion, she seemed gradually more and more drawn by the influence of their conversation, in which she principally

figured, till she at last became the centre about which they gathered. Sir Everard then went and sat by Mrs. Narracott.

Between Mr. and Mrs. Narracott and Sir Everard Delafosse had, for now four years, subsisted a most intimate acquaintance. A remarkable literary success, entailing nothing at all like popularity, but arising partly from the approbation of the really critical, and partly from the curiosity of the merely fashionable, had made Sir Everard be sought for by many who would never otherwise have heard of his name, or, hearing it, would not have associated it with anything particularly worth courting. Among these was Montagu Narracott, who, then a litterateur well known about town, was always on the look-out for what he called, in familiar language, men of mark. But as Sir Everard was the last man in the world to think anybody entitled to claim his acquaintance because he had written a clever book, and as Montagu Narracott be-

longed by reputation to a class of people whom, because perfectly ignorant of them, the successful young author held least in favour, it is highly probable that Narracott's generous and courteous advances would have led to nothing like intimacy, had there been no other inducement, appreciable at once, to accept it. But, sensitive to beauty in all directions, to a degree for which, in an Englishman, it is difficult to account, Delafosse saw, in a first glance at Montagu Narracott's wife, a gratification for his eyes such as he was not likely to forego. He did not then know that her loveliness, though the greatest, was far from being the only one of her charms, nor that her husband was a man worth going through much trouble to know, even if he had had for wife the ugliest woman in Europe. But it was not a fortnight before he knew both.

Bright, energetic, straightforward, and fearless, Montagu Narracott had then al-

ready made of but a moderately good education, and of abilities, certainly superior, but not astounding, the very best possible use. Of course, he had a good stout fight of it. He was a hard but not a cruel hitter, and had a knack of knocking a man over without very much hurting him. Of course, some of his blows had not been quite forgotten, but none, I think, were remembered rancorously. He had never thrust unfairly but once, and that once by accident, and not by malice; and the parade made of the thrust by its conspicuous object only made Narracott the more regret it, and the public the more condemn the uses to which the other had applied it. He had begun life at twenty, with barely the most economical bachelor's means of single subsistence. But, whilst other men, with as fair a start, as good a head, and as sound a constitution, who had embarked in the same profession, were still smoking in pothouses, supping in cellars, boozing in coffee-houses, and ac-

cusing fate, Narracott, at twenty-three, had married a wife, rented a house, gave occasional quiet little dinners, faced his creditors, and paid his bills. At last, he had written a book which had brought him considerable remuneration, and had lifted him out of the mere arena of litterateurship, beyond which he had not previously figured. He enjoyed his success immensely, and had the satisfaction of feeling that he thoroughly deserved it. A man always seems to be fortunate who succeeds; and certainly, in one important point, he had fortune to thank for his success. He had made the most of the conditions amid which he had found himself; but then the conditions had been, when his character came to be considered, extremely favourable. He had, by nature, powerful social qualities, and a very keen perception of phenomena; and it was for him the luckiest thing in the world that the necessities of struggle threw him into a superficial society where phenomena are

numerous, and threw him into it before he had attained his majority. I do not think that any amount of solitude could have made a god of him, and moneyed ease would have probably made him only indolent, not reflective. So that the busy, observant life which he was compelled to lead, harmonised best and co-operated with his natural faculties. Hence, now at four-and-thirty, he had produced a book which, without being either deep or broad, was—like himself—very true, and bright, and animated, and popular.

You would have gone round Europe without finding a man mentally more different from this last than his unflinching friend, Sir Everard Delafosse. Probably Sir Everard admired Narracott more than Narracott admired him, since the reflective and philosophic mind usually appreciates the observant and practical one far more thoroughly than the observant and practical does the philosophical and reflective. Delafosse was quite

contented with Narracott being such as he was, and esteemed him accordingly. Narracott, on the other hand, would, if he could, have had Delafosse more pliant to circumstances, and more conciliatory with the accidents of his age. But the fact that the one could not soar and the other would not crawl, in no way interfered with a manly friendship that, having enough of common intellectual interest to assist it, resided upon the much broader and surer ground of loyalty, good fellowship, and brotherhood. And then this lovely wife who had so much aided in the formation of an alliance extremely valuable to each, was ever doing much to preserve it.

The relationship between her and Sir Everard was peculiar, but—and let us be immensely thankful for it—as yet in England, anything but singular. This pen, which I reverence as a soldier does his sword, shall tell no witting lies, and shall never write one single stroke to flatter or propitiate my

countrymen. But he who has lived most in any other European country, whilst seeing there no little that he might wish transferred to his own, cannot fail to return home with blessings on his lips for the women of the land that is hemmed in by the sea, and with unutterable thankfulness, not for its political structure, not for its enormous wealth, not for its fair woods, nor its stalwart sinews—for none of these necessarily; but for the one pre-eminently precious possession, the sound average prevalence of the domestic idea. So defended, long may English matrons preserve their inestimable privilege of having at their side, when they will, friends who are not their husbands, but whom withal no foul tongue shall dare asperse with the sad soft Southern pseudonym of "cavalieri serventi."

What an immense amount of admiration had this lovely woman received, and dearly did she love it. From no one, perhaps, was it so welcome, after Montagu, as from Sir

Everard. He was young, skilful, and of excellent address, and then his taste was as unimpeachable as it was severe. An ugly woman had to be very old, or very infirm, or very much in need, to get attention from him. He seemed, in society at least, to think, with Ben Jonson, that "it was for beauty that the world was made," and I fear he could be very tolerant to a fool, provided the fool happened to be a pretty one. When, as in Mrs. Narracott's case, appearance and conversation combined to charm, he became as much a slave as it was possible for woman or man to make of him. Had you asked Mrs. Narracott, she would have told you that, for either or both, to make him such, was quite impossible; and she would have told you the truth.

"Now that the new comer has, at last, thrown you over for the usual literary conversation in which these dear people invariably indulge, I am to have a word or two."

"A word or two? A thousand. You ought to commend me. I have been helping entertain your guests."

"One of them, to the neglect of the rest, and of the hostess too. And what do you make of her?"

"She has aspirations."

"To what? To your affections?"

"Neither to mine, nor to anybody else's, I should think, unless he were a critic. You may look as sceptical as you please; but, upon my word, we have been talking of nothing but her books."

"Merely a better way of talking of *her*. Ah! I wish I were an authoress."

"You do not require to be. You are talked of and talked to quite enough, without being such."

"When authoresses are not present. Griffon wanted to know if I thought you could dream of marrying her."

"Griffon's old mania. Every time we meet, he impresses upon me the same warn-

ing. Marriage is the makeshift of monotonous minds, he told me the other day."

"And who will prevail; Mr. Griffon or Lily?"

Ever so faint a flush passed across his face. He chased it completely away with a laugh, and answered:

"Which side do you back? Or rather, which side do you take? Whichever you take, wins."

"It depends. I am not going to encourage you, as long as you talk in the way you did when Lily was last mentioned between us. I don't see why we should lose you for the sake of a girl whom you do not love?"

"And who says that I do not love her?"

"I say so. When did you see her last?"

"Three weeks ago, perhaps."

"Three weeks ago! And you live within ten miles."

"But I have other things to do in this world besides going to see her. And be good enough, my dear countess, to remem-

ber that I cannot enter every house as freely as I enter yours. Suppose that fellow there," and he pointed to one of the men, "were to come, unasked, as often as once in every three weeks, what would you think?"

"I should not be at home."

"Perhaps my friends at 'The Slopes' might encounter my advances with the same defence. They are exceedingly hospitable, and constantly invite me, though I dare say they have by this time considerable, and probably painful, scruples as to whether they are doing right; and I should be very unwise, not to say indelicate, if I were to add to their scruples and their perplexity by going too often, when not invited."

"If you loved her, you would consider neither their scruples nor their perplexity. You would consider only your own feelings, and be very unwise and perhaps very indelicate, too; but at any rate, you would show that you had some affection for her. Tell me frankly, would you marry her?"

"Yes, I think so."

"And if you don't, will you be very miserable?"

"Not in the least, unless my wishes approach very much nearer to fulfilment than they have done so far. I shall perhaps be disappointed, that is all; but shall end by concluding that my disappointment is all for the best."

"Then you do not love her at all."

"I have never told her that I do."

"But you have told me so—or what is tantamount to it."

"I have told you that I want to love her."

"Absurd! I cannot comprehend you. That you do not want to marry her for her money, I am sure, or I should hate you; but what you do want to marry her for, I do not understand."

"For the simplest of reasons; because I feel morally certain that I should love her."

"Then do you love her now, or do you not?"

"Using the word in the wild way in which it is usually used, and in which I suppose you use it, I cannot be said to love her, any more than one can be said to smell a rose through the glass door of a conservatory. One may think it worth smelling, and may have a wish to smell it——"

"And may go through and do so."

"Exactly; as I am doing. Only, give me time. I am now on my way."

"You have been on it for some time. It is all nonsense. You do not love her, and you will never marry her, and Mr. Pemberton will beat you; and I sincerely hope he may. . . . Upon my word, just look at those two! This will never do. The young lady takes and keeps you on the balcony in the moonlight all the evening, and now if she has not got Montagu into the very same place! I am sure I shall hate that woman."

"You will be very foolish if you do. Montagu!"

"Yes, old fellow?"

"I am going."

"So are we all," said the deep voice, as the head with the short-cut curls emerged from the balcony.

"Good night, Miss Raffles."

"Good night, Sir Everard. On Monday, then?"

"Thanks."

CHAPTER II.

ENGLISH NEIGHBOURS.

THERE is one species of affection which seems, unlike the rest, to have been little, if at all, modified during the historic period, by the influence of succeeding and different centuries. A man no longer wins a woman by serving her father for seven years, or by his own father sending a servant with golden earrings, and as many bracelets of ten shekels. Fraternal affection has somewhat improved since Cain killed Abel, since Jacob swindled Esau, and Joseph's brethren desisted from leaving him in a dry well, only on dis-

covering that they could make twenty pieces of silver by selling him to tramps. Probably no modern father, however credulous in the matter of spiritualism, would believe a medium who recommended him to burn his eldest son alive. But the most devoted of modern mothers can boast of no advance in affection upon the Hagar that went into the wilderness with Ishmael, upon the nameless wife of the house of Levi, who hid her goodly son three months, and when she could hide him no longer, made a basket from the bulrushes, and laid him in the sedges by the river's brink; while even the tenderness of Christian art has produced no picture surpassing that of Andromache and Astyanax; and against any English verse you will, I will back the simple Latin line,

Incipe, parve puer, risu cognosere matrem.

Amidst the shifting, and the progressive, a mother's love seems to be the one thing fundamental and permanent, and to have

been as perfect from the first as it has ever since remained.

Incapable, even in dealing with a complete stranger, of a single selfish consideration, beautiful, white-haired, placid Mrs. Pemberton still loved her son Philip with the same close personal yearning as when she had awoke at night in answer to his petulant cries, and still watched over his interests with the same fond hovering tenderness, as when she had put his little palms together, and taught him how to lisp "Pray God bless me and make me a good boy, and take me to Heaven when I die, Amen." A foolish mother she was not, in any sense. She had neither excessively pampered nor unnecessarily crossed him. She had shown him the way in which she thought he ought to go, and he had gone it. She had taught him to fear God as she feared him, to honour the Established Church and the British Constitution, to think England the best country in the world, and home the very

best place in England. All these beliefs he readily imbibed; and though living in this sceptical century, he grew up without ever having a doubt about any of them, and had never hurt his mother's heart by thinking differently upon any subject from the way in which she thought of it herself. At fifteen years of age, he had to supply his father's place as well as to fill his own in the poor widow's life, and excellently well had he done both. Indeed, as far as her own regrets, after a few years, were concerned, she wished her husband back, not so much in order to occupy any void, as in order that he might see for himself what a wonderful Philip he had left behind him. She never told her son, except by looks, what she thought of him, and other people had to be very intimate indeed before she told them; and even then, a few simple words of discreet praise were all in which she indulged her love. But her admiration was manifest, and nobody could pronounce it unreasonable.

Of independent but moderate means, Philip Pemberton had not been brought up to any other occupation but that of attending to a property of some eight hundred acres, in which his mother had a life interest, and which at her death would be, without any incumbrance, his own. He had been to no university, had seen no capital save that of his native country, and even it only twice. He never knew any Greek, and no longer knew any Latin, and had not found foreign tongues necessary for the cultivation of mangolds, or the selection of short-horns. He rode tolerably well, was thoroughly at home in the stubble-field, could drink an immense quantity of port wine without knowing if it was bad, and without doing himself the slightest injury, supposing that it was; could coach you through the Church Services on the most intricate day of the year, would have gone to all the stakes ever erected for the sake of his mother, and would have broken your head incontinently if you had

said a word or done a thing against either of those scarcely now young ladies, his cousins Kate and Deborah Langley.

The first of these was probably one-and-thirty, and the second was certainly not less than twenty-eight. Orphans very shortly after Philip Pemberton had lost his father, and orphans without any legacy, they were at once taken by his mother to her home. As soon as Philip, who was perhaps a couple of years the senior of Kate, the elder of the two, was himself eighteen, his mother told him that she had, during the past three years, been saving and setting aside a part of the income which, though in right hers, she always regarded already as his, for the benefit of his two cousins. Did he approve what she had done, and should they go on doing so, until they had accumulated, say ten thousand pounds, five thousand for each of them? Men were very rarely mercenary, she hoped, but they were very often not well off—not well enough off to marry girls

who had nothing; and it might increase Kate's and Deborah's chance of getting what God had originally intended for every woman, a good husband, if they had some small independence of their own. It would take some little time to put away the sum she had named; but if meanwhile, as she hoped, Kate got a reasonable offer, she might have all that was saved, and Deborah, the younger, might wait till they had managed to put aside a similar amount for her. Philip at once agreed with his mother in this as in everything else. Fifteen years had flown quietly away since the proposition was made to him, and eighteen since his mother had first acted upon the idea on her own responsibility; and now the ten thousand pounds had been all got together and invested—where else could an honest Englishwoman's money be invested but?—in the Three per Cents. Still, no one had come for the money or the maidens. Kate had not required it all, and Deborah had not

had to wait for a fresh-begun accumulation. Truth to tell, though they were most grateful nieces and attached cousins, neither was one of those whom to look on is to love. I verily believe that they had every virtue under heaven, except the one crowning virtue in young women—that of being fair to see.

It was four of the afternoon, but a few days later than the moonlight May night of the preceding chapter. Mrs. Pemberton and her nieces were dressed as for a walk, and stood upon a gravel path that skirted the lawn, with the air that unmistakably told that they were waiting for somebody. The scene was unquestionably rural, but a little too prim and regular to satisfy the tastes of one who would leave to negligent beauty some of its natural advantages. There was no fault to be found anywhere, either with the outline of the thick-set heavy-windowed house and its spotless stucco broken by carefully trained climbers, or with the

closely shaven grass and accurately shaped parterres, or with the rounded box and oak-built summer-house scrupulously clean, or with any point or turn of this thoroughly English home. There was nothing to criticise, but there was a good deal to desire. It was very perfect, but it was rather limited. It was probably a faithful reflexion of its inhabitants, whose soul neither proud science nor any other influence had ever taught to stray. In fact, it had all the pretty faultlessness of virtuous conventionality.

"So sorry, mother dear, to have kept you waiting," said Philip, emerging at a brisk pace from the hall, "but the man from Blethering came about the silver-pheasants' eggs."

"Not at all, my dear boy; there was no hurry," and she took her son's arm, leaving Kate and Deborah to walk together a short distance behind.

Their path lay along an artificial river of at most but eighteen feet wide, but over-

hung with leafy trees, and protected by strong green banks, and winding through pleasant meadows and under frequent lanes.

"What a sweet afternoon. I hope they will not be out; but if they are, we can wait, as they are sure to be home for tea by half-past six."

"I know they will be at home, mother, for Lily told me so."

"When did you see her?"

"I met her this morning, out riding."

"Was Mr. Swetenham with her?"

"No; she was alone."

She pressed his arm.

"Did you say anything, Philip?"

"No, I was not prepared for it. I came on her by surprise; but don't you think, mother dear, I had better leave it alone a little longer? You know she is only nineteen."

"Yes, my dear, but you are, or very soon will be, three-and-thirty, and she is quite old enough to be engaged, if not perhaps to

marry. A properly minded girl has no right to suppose that a man loves her until he tells her so; and if she is at all inclined to like him, his telling her so has a great effect upon her mind."

"But do you think Lily likes me?"

"You have surely no reason," said the old lady, with a tone that, for her, placid as she was, was of surprising earnestness, "you have surely no reason, Philip, to suppose that she dislikes you."

"Not in the least. But I do not think she loves me, or even likes me so strongly that liking would become loving at once, when I told her that I loved her."

"Perhaps not at once, though it might, it might, Philip. But if not at once, it would by degrees; particularly, as to my knowledge, both Mr. and Mrs. Swetenham would do all in their power that was right, to second your wishes."

"But, don't you think——" and he hesitated.

"Don't I think what, my dear?"

"Why, that—that Lily has a—a preference for Sir Everard Delafosse?"

"I hope not, my dear; I hope not. I have never seen or heard anything to make me suppose that Sir Everard has any thoughts of her; and if he have not, it would be very indelicate for her to show, or, indeed, feel any preference for him."

How very much easier our grandmothers, and still more our great-grandmothers, must have been to win, than the young ladies whom we may have conquered, or may hope to conquer! And were they, when thus more easily won, more worth having on that account, or less? The new generation of either sex would be slow to see any positive indelicacy in a young maiden experiencing, or even in moderation exhibiting, a preference for a swain who had not yet bent knee and spoken word, and would unanimously disavow the doctrine that this last has only to love and have his love backed by the

maiden's parents, in order to be loved in return. Yet, only the other day, I heard ten thousand Italian palms spontaneously meet, and with their approving clamour interrupt Adelaide Ristori in her marvellous recitation of Dante's story of Francesca da Rimini, swift on her utterance of the merely incidental line :

> Amor, che a nullo amato amar perdona.
> Love, that from loving none beloved absolves.

Dear, good, placid, old-fashioned Mrs. Pemberton, seemed to be quite of that opinion. Let us smilingly respect it, but withal not fail to note that it holds its ground strongly only where feminine freedom has not yet made much progress, and that reasonable liberty is gradually invading even the desperate domestic strongholds, where old ladies, whose passions may fairly be supposed to have expired, would fain throw cold water on the young ones whose passions are just beginning to glow.

Philip, however, had never considered the

question of progressive liberty, and had certainly no idea that it had anything to do with any other sphere beside that of politics, and political liberty there had surely always been in England, or at any rate since the date of Magna Charta, in whatever century that might have happened to be. So quite agreeing with his mother that it would be exceedingly indelicate in Lily Swetenham to have any preference for Delafosse unless Delafosse had manifested some preference for her, and lacking courage at the moment to say that he was not quite so sure that Delafosse had not done so, he fell into silence and looked at the river.

"They are talking about Lily, and Philip's chances of marrying her," said Miss Deborah, in a cautious under tone; "I am sure they are. They always do, when they walk so close."

"I shouldn't wonder if they are," said Miss Kate, who had all that advantage in sobriety of opinion which thirty-one has over

twenty-eight. "I wish they would not talk about it at all."

"So do I, Kitty. There is not the slightest chance of Philip ever marrying her. She's just as fond as fond can be of Sir Everard, and that's all about it."

"I am not so sure of that as you are. And even supposing that she is, I don't think he troubles himself much about her. If he does care for her, he has a very funny way of showing it. He is constantly going away for months and months together; and when he *is* at The Hold, he does not come over to The Slopes above once a month."

"Yes, and I know this," broke in the impulsive Deborah, "that if anybody I was at all inclined to care for, went away as he does and came over as seldom as he comes over, I should not care for him long, whether he troubled himself about me or he didn't. But she's just infatuated with him, that's the truth."

"Nonsense, Deborah; you do run on so. He's handsome and he's amusing, and he's a baronet, and he always talks a great deal to her when he does ride over, and it's only natural that she should like him and praise him."

"Praise him! You should have heard the stuff she talked, as I told you before, last Tuesday—Tuesday week, I mean—when I was in her bedroom, putting on my bonnet. To listen to her, you would suppose that there wasn't such another clever man in England. It's the only time she did it; and I'm not quite sure that she did not do it just a little out of malice, because I said I did not think he cared for England at all, and very little for anybody in it. But she cried him up, and what she called his powers of conversation, quite absurdly."

"Well, I am sure she is quite welcome to marry him if she can, for anything I care. I only wish that aunt and Philip would give up bothering their heads about her."

"So do I. But she'll never marry Sir Everard either, unless she does what no girl who respects herself would do; for I'm certain of this, that Mr. Swetenham will never hear of it, or, if he does, Mrs. Swetenham never will."

They had said much the same sort of thing to each other more than once before, and they would say much the same sort of thing more than once again. Not to mention other more important contrasts between themselves and the young lady of whom they had been speaking, contrasts which the progress of this story will make apparent, they were, one of them, over thirty, the other close upon it, whilst she was only nineteen; and they were decidedly plain, whilst Lily was very decidedly lovely. They envied her, then, and were malicious? Not at all. Have I not already said that they were endowed with every reasonable good trait, save youth and beauty? But the mere conditions of being plain and no

longer in her first youth, compel a woman to look at things very differently from the way in which they are looked at by another who is still in her teens and exceedingly comely. Hence, it is not at all to the joint discredit of Miss Kitty and Miss Deborah that they did not find Lily Swetenham the perfection of goodness, but rather to the credit of each that they did not make her out a monster of iniquity. Again, who was Philip Pemberton to whom this young lady gave, according to themselves, very scant, if any the slightest, encouragement, but the one man who stood erect in their eyes with godlike proportions, the cousin who had been, not cousin, but brother and father both to them? And who was Sir Everard Delafosse, whom she appeared to affect so, and whom she had held up to admiration in the quiet five minutes spent the other evening before the dressing-table? He was one who had never done them any particular good turn, and

who, truth to tell, though a courteous gentleman enough, very rarely saw them, save in the society of this same Lily, and when she was present did not trouble himself to talk overmuch to anybody else. There was a good deal more to be said against him even than all this; and yet on this occasion, when we have overheard them, they did not say it. But here was surely enough to justify them in not falling down and worshipping him, as Miss Lily apparently wished them to do, and more than enough to entitle them to being deemed more than ordinarily good and charitable for saying so little, in the very freedom of private conversation, in his disfavour.

Suddenly, through the trees, had you been walking with them, you might have descried a short spire resting on a square broad tower, ivy-grown both, as was also most of the picturesque irregular little church which, immediately after, broke upon the view. Tall witch-elms, whose

trunks were also in the clasp of the lithe, strong-leaved climber, fenced and overhung the surrounding plot where irregularly lay the quiet recording tombstones among long lush grass. Leaving these on the right, and quitting a little, at last, the artificial river for a path on the left, they soon passed through a small wire gate, and were at once in an exquisite garden. To the left of where they entered stood, on the brow of a grassy incline, a large but long low house, whose material you positively could not guess for the green parasitic foliage which, in another ten days or so, would break into roses of every shade, from glowing red to snowy white; and to the right, at the bottom of the incline, you again found the river, but there circling round a delicious little ait, which looked as though it had been dropped into the pellucid water, and had forced this to eddy outwards, till restrained by mossy but substantial banks, that would no farther re-

treat. Beyond this the mimic river again pursued, between parallel curves, its devious but unbroken way.

Within the conical shade of a full-grown thorn, covered with bloom, whose pink petals ever and anon falling upon a snow-white dress, arrayed it in natural ornament without disturbing its wearer, yet told the tale of how very soon its own gay glory would have disappeared, a young girl sat reading and alone. She heard the sound of the opening of the little wire gate, and though she had hitherto been absorbed in the pages of her book, and evidently sighed for no other companionship, she rose at once from her seat, and walked cheerfully across to greet the new comers. She bore herself so well, that, though she was not very much above the middle height, you would carry away from seeing her the notion that she was tall; and though her bust and contour were rounder and riper than one usually sees in English girls of her years, her figure was so

harmoniously proportioned that most people would have spoken of her as slim. But the first point that struck you was, how exquisitely her head was put upon her neck, and how admirably gradual was the declension of her shoulders. She evidently took pride in her dress, and a woman is hardly a woman who does not take it. Hence, her hat was made to screen her head without doing it injustice, or concealing the abundance of her hair, of a brown as dark as is possible to hair that has in it a considerable dash of gold. I can tell you further that her complexion was clear, and blooming, and healthful; that her eyes were large and hazel brown; that her nose was—upon my word, I cannot decide whether it was or was not—just a little *rétroussé*, and that her lips half spoke and half concealed a firmness which she had never yet had occasion to manifest in action. But what better are you, is she, or am I, for this mere appraiser's description? And yet I cannot

tell you what she looked like. What she *must* have looked like, you ought to be able to form to yourself a notion when you have followed her through this history. This much at present may be said, that the charm of her face lay mostly in its expression, and that expression was one of mental earnestness combined with eager, credulous joy. She was manifestly very enamoured of life, without being altogether ignorant of its problems.

"You are so good to come," she said, extending her hand in turn to them all, to Philip last; "and papa and mamma will be here directly. Are you tired, Mrs. Pemberton, with your walk, and would you like to go in, or shall we stroll round the garden? It is beginning to look so pretty."

None of them were fatigued, and all preferred the latter suggestion. And as the garden and pleasantly-pathed plantation, which was almost part of the garden, were of considerable extent, some time was spent

in devious wandering. The young lady of the house, whether simply through a notion of deference to age, or more probably through this notion combined with one of a more self-regarding nature, kept pretty close, nearly all the time, to the old one. Incidental remarks were constantly being thrown backwards and forwards between her and the sisters, but these, as during the stroll to The Slopes, walked together, and usually behind. Philip did his best to keep with his mother and Miss Swetenham, or, perhaps, it would be more correct to say with Miss Swetenham and his mother. But as it very often occurred that there was room upon the gravel paths only for two ladies, and plenty of room for those two, only because one of them had not accepted the novelty of broadened skirts, Philip was every now and then compelled to drop behind and walk between them and his cousins, or to go before; and he could then have part in the conversation only by walking backwards. A man must

be rather skilful and very confident to play this awkward part with decent success. Any want of address, or, worse, of confidence, doubles the natural perplexity. I cannot say that Mistress Lily helped him out very much. She called him Philip, and he called her Lily, and she always made some sort of remark in answer to any of his; but when he was behind and wanted to get in front again, in order to give stress to something particular he had to say, she did not go out of her way to make it more easy for him, but stuck to the old lady's arm, and chattered away to her with a bright sparkling merriment which, after the presence of her son, was, perhaps, the greatest personal enjoyment of Mrs. Pemberton's life. She loved this beautiful, liberally endowed Lily with all her heart. Yes, with *all* her heart; for she had set it upon seeing Lily nothing less than bone of Philip's bone, and flesh of his flesh. And as she knew that Philip loved her, and that Mr. and Mrs. Sweten-

ham desired nothing better than that he should marry her, she with her simple dear old notions, as she a short while ago expressed them, entertained so little doubt about the upshot, that it amounted in her placid breast to no doubt at all. Certainly, Lily displayed no striking tenderness to Philip, and Mrs. Pemberton would have been terribly disgusted with her if she had, since her son, whatever his attentions, had as yet made nothing like an open avowal of his feelings. But Lily displayed considerable tenderness and predilection for her; and as she was not conscious of possessing any attraction beyond that of being that brave boy's mother (for of course he was a boy to her), she might naturally enough conclude, if she wittingly argued upon the subject at all, that this tenderness was but a delicate anticipation of the larger and deeper tenderness which would eventually be bestowed upon him, to her connexion with whom she was indebted for all this

present arm-taking, and pretty attention, and pleasant sunny prattle.

And was Philip Pemberton very desperately in love with her? And how had it come about? As love does come about in quiet homely English places — viz. by the somewhat prosaic-sounding but blameless process of the force of habit, and the presence of certain circumstances, and the absence of any other. By dining constantly at the same table, riding along the same lanes, praying under the same church spire, having your grandfathers and grandmothers lying in the same churchyard and your names on the same baptismal register, by being vaccinated by the same doctor, suffering the same wet days and the same sunny ones, asking after the same people, and all those people unanimously and independently coming to the conclusion that it *ought* to come about, and that you, Jack, will marry her, Joan, as sure as that the parish stocks, though they may be no longer used, are standing on the green

hard-by the pond where geese do congregate.

And does a love so born and bred ever wax into what can honestly be called a passion? Perhaps not. But when a man has got very little to do, and still less to think about, and he goes along for three or four years with the knowledge that he has, some time or other, to marry and live with such and such a girl, and that everybody about him fully expects him to do so, there grows up within that man's breast what may fairly be called a personal attachment, and a conviction, by no means mistaken or unnatural, that should he unfortunately not succeed in marrying her, he will be sure to feel very uncomfortable, if not indeed miserable, and that it is very unlikely he will ever marry anybody else. But he can no more tell you when and where this frame of mind first sprung up, than he could name the exact day on which he arrived at the age of reason, or ceased to ride his rocking-

horse. He had grown into it, or it into him; for, anyhow, it was there.

Mr. Swetenham and his wife must then have had some share in this silent but general conspiracy? Unquestionably they had. Just twenty-one years ago, Philip Pemberton's father had successfully exercised his private influence in obtaining for his college friend the presentation to the living of Rymington. It was worth only three hundred a year, but joined with the other three which the young clergyman already possessed, it enabled him to marry Clara Venables, whom he had wooed and won long before, but for prudential reasons had not thitherto been permitted to marry. The new vicar was already thirty-nine, and his wife very little, if any, less than thirty years of age; but they were a strikingly handsome couple, and had so much of youthfulness left—and it is no little—as can be preserved by unwavering love and blameless habits. They did not then and

there inhabit The Slopes—the lord of the manor, whom Mr. Pemberton had influenced, lived at The Slopes in those days—but in a pretty quiet cottage not very far away, still dear and designated as the birthplace of Lily, who slipped quietly into the world within a year of their arrival. Godfrey Pemberton, more fortunate at starting than his university chum, had been married these thirteen years and more, and could already point to a son of twelve, no other, of course, than Philip. But the race sooner begun was sooner over; and as we already know, after three years of yet increased happiness, by the vicinity of his friend, he suddenly passed away and was laid under those witch-elms by the broken-voiced vicar of Rymington. Fortune not unoften comes at the very time when it is impossible thoroughly to enjoy her visits; and when, but a month later, Mr. Swetenham found himself, by the sudden death of a younger and bachelor brother, who was rapidly amassing an im-

mense fortune in the East, a legatee to the startling sum of between fifty and sixty thousand pounds, he could think far less of this accession of wealth than of his buried neighbour, and turned, like the poet, from all it brought to what it could not bring.

Time, the mitigator, withal, brought at length moderation to his regrets, and gave him power to appreciate the advantages which his brother's legacy had entailed. The lord of the manor was, shortly after, obliged to carry an invalid wife to the northern shores of a southern sea, and offered the vicar a lease of The Slopes. This he willingly accepted. But with the exception of the rent and the considerable expenses which it necessarily drew in its train, the more than comfortable income which he now enjoyed was spent noiselessly, not only in his own parish, but in regions which he never gave himself the luxury of penetrating, though with their wants he scrupulously made himself acquainted. The Slopes was a

lovely place, and was maintained in a condition befitting its loveliness; but there was no need for parade in a district where there really was no one to be struck by it; and even had there been, it is more than probable that this reverend English gentleman would have equally adhered to the good old plan of elegant, unostentatious simplicity.

The unforeseen and lamentable death of Godfrey Pemberton brought, however, no change in the neighbourly relations between his son and widow, who still remained at Beechwood Pyke, and the vicar and his wife at Rymington. Then came the two nieces, and Mr. and Mrs. Swetenham immediately extended to them the friendship which they entertained for the good lady who had so piously adopted them. Meanwhile, Philip rose out of his teens to early manhood, and little Lily was scarce little Lily any longer, but, entering upon hers, was bashfully and blushingly struggling to extricate herself from childhood, and longing to have long

dresses and be called Miss Swetenham. Even then it was, if not earlier, that the notion that the pretty fairy would have to marry the master of Beechwood, began to float in the air. Slowly, and baffling all investigation into the steps of the process, did this notion, as such things do, take shape, and something like substantiality. As invisible floating moisture becomes by pressure condensed into tangible settled dew, so did it by the continuing force of surrounding circumstance become definite, and so sink into people's minds and stay there. Perhaps Mr. Swetenham was one of the last consciously to receive it; but in him, too, as in all others, despite of no word said or step taken, quietly dwelt the idea that, in all probability, there would be an alliance betwixt his own blood and that of the dear old friend on whose grave he could not to this day look without the ancient sorrow rising to his eyes. The long dresses came, and there was a Miss Swetenham—to all except

the denizens of Beechwood, Philip included; and now folks asked themselves no longer if she would really marry young Pemberton, but simply remarked what a lucky fellow he was to have been provided with such a beautiful domestic prospect, without having had the trouble to look for it.

Indeed, could a man's fortunes well stand higher? An adoring mother, worshipping cousins, a sufficient income, well-balanced health, no ambition, and a lovely girl marked out to be his wife by parish acclamation and the favour of her father—such were Philip Pemberton's natural and artificial advantages. But these were not all. However willing Mr. Swetenham might be that such a union should take place, and however confident that it would do so, his sentiments were quiet and moderate when compared with those of his wife. She desired it with all her strong capacity of volition, and backed it with all the artifices of her graceful ingenuity. With her husband, the wish was one,

for the most part, of sentiment; with her it was an affair almost entirely of conscience. She was a most excellent woman, and the worthy wife of so beneficent a husband. But her convictions were much stronger, and her purposes more earnest. She was, in reality, though the companion of an English clergyman of the most tolerant type, inclined to be Calvinistic in her principles. But then her Calvinism was tempered by a tender heart, and she was lovable in spite of that one unlovable point. This, however, led her to conclude, by a process distinct from and much graver than that of her neighbours, that her daughter must and ought to marry Philip Pemberton. Other people might see long-established friendship, neighbouring houses, and almost daily intercourse, and so arrive at their conclusion. But she saw the finger of God, the interference of Heaven, and a predestined marriage. Providence was watching over the two families, and was about formally to unite them after they had

long in reality been but one. Philip was a man after her own heart, and she was quite sure after God's, too. He had ancestry, substance, a saintly mother, steadiness of manners, and regularity of habit. He did just those things which he ought to do, and did not those things which he ought not to do. He stayed at home, and had opinions like everybody else, and was in no respects like one of "the young people of these days." I had almost forgotten to mention that he never smoked; but had he ever done so, she and the rest also would have been about as much astonished and alarmed as if he had blasphemed.

Contrary to Miss Swetenham's expressed anticipations, her parents did not return till about eight o'clock. She had done the honours, she said, in their absence, and tea, for the first time that year, had been had on the lawn. Now, the slight chill of night began to make itself felt, by the elder ones at least,

and to out-door meal and exercise succeeded in-door game and talk. Lily sat playing backgammon with Mrs. Pemberton, and Miss Kate and Miss Deborah were both industriously cutting holes in something and seemingly sewing them up again. Mrs. Swetenham was knitting for the poor, and her husband and Philip were flitting about, the former, as of right and of duty, generally giving the key to the conversation.

"Have you seen Sir Everard since his return?" asked Mrs. Pemberton, throwing double sixes to her infinite delight, but to the delight equally great of Lily, who loved that the old lady should beat—it pleased her so.

"Once only," answered Mr. Swetenham.

"About three weeks ago," subjoined his wife. "No doubt he has a good deal to do and to see to, after so long an absence."

"He has been away six or seven months, has he not?" inquired Miss Kate.

"Only six," said Miss Swetenham. . . . "There, Mrs. Pemberton, you have beaten me. Shall we have just one more?"

"Yes, my dear. . . . Six months, has he? How was he looking?"

"Admirably well," said Mr. Swetenham. "He certainly seems no worse for his absence abroad."

"He does not like our winters, and they do not suit him," said Miss Swetenham quietly across the board, to the old lady.

"What, my dear?" asked her mamma.

"Lily was saying," Mrs. Pemberton answered for her, "that our winters do not agree with him."

"They agree with other people," said the hostess. "I should think that is all fancy, and the truth is, he finds them dull and stupid. When people have been long accustomed to the excitement of travelling and of change, they do not readily settle down to a quiet English home."

"But there is plenty of amusement and of excitement in England during the winter," remarked Miss Deborah; "for men, at least, there is hunting, and——"

"Ah, yes! hunting!" exclaimed Philip. "That's it, Deborah. There's hunting, the finest sport in the world; wish I were going out, to-morrow."

"But everybody cannot have the same tastes, Philip," broke in Miss Swetenham. "There are other amusements in the world besides hunting, and perhaps of a higher order."

"Three-four was your throw, my dear and you have played four-five."

"So I have; pardon me."

"Quite true," Philip had answered, swift to propitiate a pleasure which he feared he had slightly outraged! "perfectly true, Lily. But Sir Everard not only can enjoy those other amusements, but can ride across country with the best of us, when he

chooses. I assure you, Mr. Swetenham, I saw him out one day on a rattling chesnut, and he went at everything, rail, and water, and wall—and some precious ugly ones too, that nearly everybody else shirked — as straight as the scent."

Miss Swetenham had held the dice-box a moment suspended in her hand, and was looking and listening with eyes that she did not often give to Philip's phraseology. He saw that he had more than propitiated her, so crept near to the table, where, however, by that time, she was again deep in her game.

"Then it is a great pity he does not do oftener what he can do so well," replied Mrs. Swetenham, who stood too firmly upon the old ways to have heard, or if she had heard, to have listened to, the more modern feminine idea that hunting is a cruel sport. "They say that he is paying off the incumbrances on his estate very rapidly, and that he has a very good agent. But I should think both would go on better if he were

more there. And when he does come home, I fancy he is almost as much in London as at home."

"No doubt, my dear," said her husband; "the very business connected with the incumbrances on Batterton, for which he is not to blame——"

"O, of course not—I know that, my dear."

"That very business forces him to go up to town. When he dined with us, as you say, about three weeks ago, shortly after his return from Egypt, he told me that he should be obliged to go and stay a week or so in London on that account, and that he was very sorry for it, inasmuch as the two places in the world most distasteful to him, were Paris and London."

"You have beaten me again, I declare," said Miss Swetenham, rising and kissing her opponent. "There is no playing against you."

Mrs. Pemberton, glowing with pleasant

smiles, kissed the girl fondly back, stroked her glossy hair, and then likewise rose, and went over to the window and seated herself by Lily's mother. Mr. Swetenham soon followed, and the younger ones gathered into a knot at the other end of the room.

After another ten minutes' gossip, Mrs. Pemberton's mild voice broke upon the younger conclave.

"Now, my dears, I think we ought to be going; what think you, Philip?"

"Yes, mother, by all means," he answered, though he did not look anxious to take his leave.

"If Lily will only sing us just one of her charming little songs before we go."

"Anything to please *you*, though you did beat me to-night so terribly."

Miss Swetenham had a voice admirably adapted to, and sufficiently well trained for, the songs which she sang. She never wasted it upon wretched modern ballads, nor overtaxed it in intricate Italian bravuras. She went

straight to the piano, and to an equally simple melody sang these simple words:

"Sadder than lark when lowering
Clouds defend the sky,
Sadder than wild swan pouring
Death-notes ere it die,
Sadder than winds imploring
Shelter when storms are high;
Could'st thou be less than adoring,
More sad were I.

"Happy as streamlet flowing
Through banks of heathery peat,
Happy as murmur going
Through the inclining wheat,
Happy as mother glowing
Over her little one's feet;
I am happy in knowing
Thou art mine, my sweet!"

Then shawls were donned, cheeks kissed, and good nights given. It was a clear bright night, though there was no moon, and they would return home by the path along which they had come. Lily walked with them to the little wire gate, again taking hold of Mrs. Pemberton's arm, and telling her what a shame it was to always want to win at backgammon, but how she should be well beaten

the next time. Then she bade them good-bye. But as they walked along the water, they could hear a clear young voice in the garden behind them soaring into the summer night, singing as it retreated,

> "I am happy in knowing
> Thou art mine, my sweet!"

CHAPTER III.

THIS PICTURE AND THAT.

UPON the hall-steps of an English country-house a young man was still standing, whilst the dark-chesnut thorough-bred, from which he had just dismounted, was being led away to its stall. He was but very little short of that six-foot which is typical of physical pre-eminence, and would have been given it all by a careless observer. Let people say what they will, but the modern costume of a northern gentleman does perfect justice to the figure of him who happens to possess a good one. Had you even just stepped out

from some Roman gallery where the toga alternates with the nude, you would have been unable, unless classical even to bigotry, to deny that the tightly-strapped riding trousers, closely-fitting vest of spotless white, and more loosely cut coat of unadorned velvet, left entirely undeformed, at least, a figure which not even a Greek sculptor would have seen any reason to idealise. A head is seen better when the bearer is sitting than when he is standing; and luckily, at this very moment, he seats himself negligently on the upper step, unbonneting as he does so, and placing his hat carelessly by his side on the floor, and drawing from a simple Florentine case of plaited straw a cigar which is swiftly lighted and placed between his lips.

It is a beautiful head, there can be no two opinions about it, and carried if not proudly, yet with a loftily unconscious dignity. There is no one single point which at first sight obtrudes itself upon you at the expense of

the rest, or which, when you have examined all the other points, will force you to return to it, and dwell upon it as the key of the facial position. It is a head essentially harmonious, which none but a professed physiognomist would think of taking to pieces, and which even a professed physiognomist would not take to pieces more than once. Even he, after satisfying himself that the component parts were justly allotted, would henceforward rest satisfied with the composition. I am not even an amateur physiognomist, and neither, perhaps, is my reader; but such a portrait as words can give, I dare say he will wish to have, and I am willing to draw. *Ab Jove principium:* let us begin with the brow. Light gold-brown hair, yet slightly moist with the dew of the recent healthful exercise, curls round and waves away from a broad frank forehead, upon which truthfulness and abiding love of truth are written as legibly as was murder on the front of Cain. On either

side towards the temples it slopes away as calmly as a woman's or a child's; but over the eyebrows it gathers itself up like a great strong wave about to break, and there hangs pausing. But the eyes underneath seem all unconscious of this severe intellectual sentry above them that, be sure, is always upon guard, and look straight out with a trustful unconcern upon a world they want neither to vanquish nor deceive, but only to welcome and to win. They are eyes, bright big clear grey eyes, transparent yet profound, joyous though tender, the eyes, you could swear, that have been inherited from a mother. The complexion of the cheeks would be girlish, had he the misfortune to be delicate; but, though you can still see that the skin is abnormally fine, an equable constitution and constant exposure to the wind and sun and rain, and every shift of heaven, have given it the russet-brown, failing which I fear he would be deficient in external manliness. He can

scarcely be said to have whiskers, for the golden beard begins so low down, and is at first so slight on the jaw; but when once it takes the curve of the face, it sweeps round in fine but copious curls, hiding a chin which I cannot help thinking, could we but see it, would not belie his other features. The beard, however, is not long; and the moustache, similar in colour, is slight enough even to permit full judgment of a mouth which, though by no means weak, is sufficiently sensitive to need all that commanding brow to prevent it from betraying its owner into generous follies. What age is he? Nine-and-twenty, I should think. Not more.

I know that heroes are out of fashion, and human monsters are for the moment à la mode. Men are nothing if not dangerous, and women not worth reading about unless they sin. I am sorry to say that I can offer you only a considerable preponderance of virtue, with of course a smattering of

blundering and weaknesses, but nothing, I fear, that rises to the dignity of a crime. My hero *will* be a hero, a brave noble gentleman such as, on my honour, I believe may be matched by the experience of everybody whose acquaintance with mankind is not confined to law reports. May not a man be a true knight, though he wear no sword at his side? May he not have a spotless escutcheon, though he carry it to no tilt or tourney? May he not be fearless and without reproach, without being called Bayard? And does "every inch a king" necessarily include the cubit that a crown can add to the stature?

A servant passed across the hall.

"Is Mr. Champion's room ready?"

"Yes, Sir Everard."

"I thought he would have been here by this time. In any case, I will dine at seven."

"Yes, Sir Everard."

He rose to his feet.

"Just take this hat, and give me my wide-awake."

He stepped on to the lawn. So big and fine a fellow might have been pardoned, and assuredly would have been envied, if he had stalked. But he did not stalk in the least. His was the quietest of walks. His very step was a lesson in moderation.

It was that particular time of the year when spring has performed all her beautiful enfranchising office, but has not yet quite gone. All the blossom had fallen, and all the fruit been formed, but it could not yet be deemed set summer whilst the cuckoo was still calling alliteratively in the woods. There were no more leaves to come out; but all the plenteous foliage had that bright green moist fresh shimmer which we invariably blend with delicious vernal memories. The roses had broken through all restraint, and were scrambling up trellis-work, or flaunting gaily upon their standard stems, or weighing lowlier and less powerful stalks

down to the ground; but the sound of the scythe had been heard for the first time that day, and the pink thorn was only just beginning to yield to the white elder. But the warning was being given. Another day or two of warmth like this, and spring would melt silently away in the haze of summer heat.

Though it was evident enough that the large flat garden grounds were, no more than the dark red brick mansion which they fronted, the work of yesterday, there were at every step the distinctest traces of recent, and as yet uncompleted, restoration. As far as one could make out, without any positive information, it seemed as though the director, whoever he was, of the present change, designed a considerable limitation of the garden's original extent; for a low paling, against which were evergreens, evidently planted but the preceding autumn, already stretched athwart almost its

entire breadth. Beyond this, had you gone up and peered over, you would have seen a weed-grown, far-extending plot, which had clearly once been broken up into flower-beds and gravel-paths, but which now only wanted planting with trees to fall under the dominion of the woodland beyond. Looking back at the big many-windowed house, you would never have guessed that it had undergone a transformation similar to that of its pleasure-grounds; for all the panes were bright and sparkling, and pleasant curtains hung in orderly folds behind. But this was the one sham which Sir Everard not only permitted, but had been the very first to suggest. But very little of that long Georgian building was tenanted by anything but furniture. Still, though its owner never set foot within a fourth of its apartments, his eye was too fastidious to be able to look up at the great frontage, and meet window-shutters or un-

relieved squares. It is usually mean to hide one's poverty; but it is at once just, generous, and judicious to screen its deformity.

He had walked leisurely almost as far as the paling, when he turned and saw a figure coming quickly over the grass.

"Ha! here he is."

Another ten seconds and the two men were together.

"Well, Champion, how are you? Delighted to see you. I have nothing to send to meet you. When we're poor, we—you know the rest. But I would have gone myself to the station, had I known what time you were coming. But you men of genius, like lovers, disregard time and space; and you said nothing in your letter about the train or the hour."

The words were kind and cordially uttered; but there was in them that tone of banter which, however little he may intend or be conscious of it, one man never uses to another unless he be given by nature,

or have acquired by habit, a relation towards him who is addressed of indefinite superiority. It may be superiority of age, or size, or strength, or intellect, or money, and is generally accompanied by some sort of affection or other; but it is the affection of the patron, not of the equal. Had the speaker been aware of this, he would have cut off his tongue rather than have indulged in it to Ambrose Champion. But our precise relationship to our neighbours we rarely know; and it depends too much upon them also for it to be entirely within our own control, even if we ever succeed in bringing it within our cognisance.

But the nervous and broken, though boisterous, laugh which came in response to the greeting, would have been assurance enough to a third person that Champion thoroughly comprehended the reason for the tone of banter of which the banterer himself was wholly unconscious, and further, that he only half liked it.

"Disregard time and space: ha, ha! Very kind of you to think of coming to meet me. I wish you had. I would have told you what train I was coming by, but I had not a 'Bradshaw' by me when I wrote."

"I suppose not. Did you ever have one? Come, tell the truth, Champion, did you ever *see* one? You have evidently heard of such a publication, and that surprises me very much. But did you ever hold one in your hand?" The other went on laughing. "What is it like? Is it bound in stout vellum with clasps, or does it roll up like a papyrus, or peel into layers like the wax tablets found at Pompeii, or what is it like? Such classical dons as you scorn all the light literature of a run-and-read century. How you ever get to a place at all, I don't understand. When did you start? Did you leave London the day before yesterday, and have you been lying at junctions, like lost luggage?"

"No; I left at two, and have had three hours of rail, and an hour or so from the station."

"You walked! Why the deuce did you not take a curricle of some sort?"

"There wasn't one."

"Wasn't one!"

"Nothing but a closed fly, and——"

"But where's your luggage?"

"At the station. A fellow promised to bring it up in his cart to-morrow. I have here"—and as he spoke he touched his coat—"all that I want."

It was a great, long, loose over-coat of blue German cloth, with any number of pockets, all of which were evidently crammed almost to bursting.

"Good Heavens! You walk six miles a sweltering day like this, with an immense over-coat—and such a coat!"

"A splendid coat—I got it at Magdeburg——"

"In Catherine-street, you mean."

"No, Delafosse, upon my word, in eighteen——"

"All right: in Magdeburg, if you prefer it. But what the deuce have you got in it? All you want, eh? A toothbrush and a library." He made at one of the outer pockets. "The last issue of the Dellacruscan dictionary, I suppose, and all the learning printed at Tübingen for the last five years. Well, we must go in, for dinner will be ready directly. Never mind dressing, though you *have* got all you want. I should think you'd got a court suit in that breast-pocket, by the look of it—sword and all."

The new comer was nearly as tall as Sir Everard Delafosse, and was decidedly bigger. If he was not forty years of age, Time had treated him very scurvily. His hair, which was still abundant, was rapidly becoming iron-grey; but his beard and moustache, being dark-red, were holding out longer against the intrusive discolora-

tion of years. His features were strong and distinct; but his eyes and complexion were marked with a wild melancholy that, if it prevented him from being good looking, saved him also from being positively ugly. At times he looked almost ferocious, when his face was in repose; but you could not help being satisfied that in reality he was not so in the least, and by degrees you came somehow to imagine that, if anything, he was deficient in physical courage, and probably in moral courage also. Both appearance and manner so much contributed to give him an air of considerable genius, that it took a very long time to discover that he had none at all. Many people never discovered it; and among them must be numbered himself. Some men look poor who are not so, just as some even equally fallaciously look rich. But anybody would have dared guess that Ambrose Champion was, and had always been, needy; and a confident person could have ventured to

prophesy that he would for ever remain such. They would all have been right.

The dinner was good, but modest and plainly served. In the very manner of eating it there was a striking contrast between the two men, from which a looker-on at once shrewd and imaginative would have constructed a couple of characters and perhaps of histories. The appetite of one was healthy but critical and reflective; of the other, it was rapid, voracious, undiscriminating, almost savage. One dined, the other ate. One considered every prandial offer, and accepted or rejected according to the dictates of a subtle palate; the other was at the mercy of the attendant waiter, and sent no plate empty away. He seemed to think that he had eaten nothing as long as something remained to be eaten. He treated wines with like impartiality. Not having the remotest notion what he was devouring, it was not to be expected that he should care to know what he drank with it. Of

three glasses, he invariably chose the one that was nearest or fullest. Watching his manner, you might have been inclined to think that his undistinguishing acceptance of everything and all, arose from sheer absence of mind and spirituality of soul, and have attributed to his particular host only the difficult temper of a sybaritic materialist. How wrong you would have been! It would be nearer the mark, though perhaps not wholly true, to say, that the appetite of Sir Everard was sensitive, and that of Ambrose Champion sensual. At any rate, it is something to be saved from the commission of enormities even by no loftier security than a fastidious taste.

But there was more to be concluded from the contrast than this. Champion had learned twice as many languages and read twenty times as many books as Delafosse; but he could not speak one of the first with common decency, nor make use of one of the second with accuracy except after another reference

to its pages; whilst the younger man was rarely at a loss for an immediate quotation or authority, and could have made love or held his scientific own, in the only two continental tongues with which he professed to be acquainted. Champion's head was in fact very much like what his stomach must have been. It was well stocked; but it resembled a library in which all the books are tumbled on the floor. The young baronet's may perhaps be equally well likened to the modest bookcase of a maiden's sanctuary, in which the volumes are few, but all are favourites. The one was all appetite, the other almost all palate.

We may be sure that this peculiarity of his guest did not fail to strike, as it had so often struck before, the eyes that had in consequence so many intervals left to them, during the meal, for amused examination. And though the immediate cause of his amusement could not be made the subject of banter, it provoked and kept alive in him

the spirit of playful raillery which every fresh encounter with Champion never failed at first to provoke. It was entirely sportive, never for a second sarcastic. It was teazing and inquisitive, but of an inquisitiveness that never expected, indeed never waited for, an answer. It went on in an unceasing vein of pleasantry, in the humour of which tone of voice and facility of manner played a part even more important than the lightness of his language; so that it would be impossible to reproduce it here. Fortunately, it is not necessary. Sufficient is it to say that it lasted the whole of dinner, during which Champion ate and intermittently broke into loud short shouts of laughter fully as extraordinary as everything else about him.

But when the rites of hospitality had been more than sufficiently deferred to, and Delafosse felt at last that he could propose a move into the garden, Champion very soon showed that his appetite for talking was fully as large as his appetite for eating. During

dinner Delafosse had had the talking nearly all to himself, whilst the other seemed single-minded enough to be satisfied with the one more immediate occupation of swallowing. But now he fell into comparative silence, and Champion got the word and kept it, and harangued by the twenty minutes together. In fact, he did not talk; he declaimed. He talked as he had eaten, voraciously, and never stopped when he could help it. When Delafosse struck in, it was with an aphorism or an epigram. It is all the more necessary that this should be stated, inasmuch as out of sheer pity I shall not set down those interminable sentences in which he first lost himself and his meaning, and then his hearer. From what will be set down, it might be imagined that the conversation was very fairly divided. But, be it invariably remembered that the words of one are fairly reported, those of the other abbreviated.

"Have you learned to smoke yet?" said Delafosse, holding out his cigar-case.

"No. You, I suppose, smoke more than ever after your visit to the East?"

"No; if anything, less. I thought I smoked just a little too much; so mended my ways accordingly."

"Of course you have brought a book back from the East."

"A book! What about?"

"Egypt, the Holy Land, or both."

"Not a line."

"You don't say so. Impossible."

"Why, what would you have me write about Egypt? I never put up for a pundit. To write a book about Egypt, a man should be a first-class scholar and a good comparative philologist, or if not these, at least a laborious excavator. I am none of these."

"O, but you could write your impressions: generally original, and always striking when served up in your telling style."

It was noticeable that Delafosse, though apparently nowise affected by the compliment, did not at all affect to repudiate it.

In fact, it sounded and was accepted as the most natural remark in the world. He answered simply:

"I have no itch for serving-up"—he rather leant over this word—"my impressions in a style telling, or otherwise. One is not bound to write 'From Dan to Beersheba,' in order to prove that one did not find the journey barren."

"But the Holy Land! You don't mean to say that you come home from such a journey as that and have no desire to say anything about it to the world?"

"Not the slightest."

"You were interested?"

"Profoundly."

"But when you say you have not brought a book back with you, you do not mean that you have not brought a poem, or a collection of poems, at any rate?"

"Neither one nor the other."

"But the town, my dear fellow, will expect it from you."

"The town—whatever that may be—is far too busy to expect any such thing. You live in a Bedlam of proof-sheets, and you fancy that the town. Whatever attention it ever momentarily was good enough to give to me, it has, I am sure, long since withdrawn."

"Not in the least. Why, it was only the other night that a lot of fellows were——"

"O yes; a lot of fellows who think a new book necessarily more important than a new corkscrew."

"No, but other people—plenty of them, I tell you—look to you for——"

"Bah! They will look in vain."

"But not a single sonnet about Galilee?"

"Not a line. Galilee has already had its poet, whom I am quite content to read without travestying; a poet who was a lyrist on the Mount, a satirist in the Temple, and a dramatist in the Garden."

"Have you returned then from the Holy Land," asked the other with a slight mockery

in his tone, "reconverted to your original views, or indeed converted to views still stronger, in the same direction?"

"What original views?"

"The usual English beliefs to which you were born, but which you had discarded when I saw you last."

"Not in the least. What made you suppose so, or that I had accepted still stronger views; I presume you mean Oriental ones?"

"Perhaps I had no reason. Only the words you just dropped—words true enough, no doubt—joined to the restored condition of the chapel, which I remarked as I walked up from the gates, led me inadvertently and perhaps foolishly to imagine for a moment that you could once more change your opinions."

"I hope that I shall change them often before I die, or I shall be likely to live and die very terribly in the wrong, or else die very soon. When we have ourselves

discovered what is the truth, we may then be hard upon other people's errors, but not before. Most if not all absolute errors are provisional truths, the paradox of to-day being the truism of to-morrow, and the absurdity of the day after. In all probability, formal creeds are sent, like parents, to educate us until we are able to do without them. I do not think that my tenants have arrived at this advanced state; they are still in a condition of theological pupilage, and I cheerfully, and without hesitation, contribute to their instruction, under the best guidance one can get them to accept."

Had you overheard the whole conversation and watched it narrowly, you would have seen that Champion was always trying, consciously or unconsciously, to drive the young baronet into some logical, and therefore false, extreme, and that the latter invariably evaded the pressure put upon him by a conclusion, the suppressed major premiss of

which, had it been formulated, would always have had tacked to it the proviso, "as far as we know at present." He never forgot to be moderate. If any man ever could walk upon the edge of Mahomet's sword, it seemed as if it were he who would do it. To his guest this tone appeared not so much to be a cause of annoyance as of disappointment. He had known Sir Everard when the young baronet's mind was still very different, when ardour was yet its prominent characteristic, and the man's strong personality pervaded all its utterances.

After a long pause, succeeding one of the most determined attempts to force Delafosse into partisanship, Champion exclaimed suddenly:

"Then all your ambition is dead."

"My personal ambition?" asked the other, very quietly. "I sincerely trust so."

"But every man," said Champion, more quickly and more briefly than was his wont

—"every man must perforce be to himself the centre of the universe."

"And I have no objection," rejoined the other, with equal rapidity, "to his being the centre, provided he be not the circumference also."

The metaphor had failed. Champion tried another.

"But, if you remove personal ambition, you do away with the motive power of human action. As Pope says so admirably, 'Reason the card, but Passion is the gale.'"

"Yes: but that was before the invention of steam. He and Bolingbroke would not make the same blunder now. With our higher moral, as with our higher material, motive power, we are no longer in danger of being becalmed. Passion is an excellent auxiliary, sometimes; but no reasonable man can wish to be at its mercy, even for his impetus."

Metaphor number two had met even with a worse fate than its predecessor. Delafosse

was getting tired of standing at bay and tossing his antagonist. So he broke loose into the old open banter.

"And you—what have you been doing? I expected to come back from the East and find you on the pinnacle of Fame: the editor of a new quarterly, the king of critics, or the chief of song; either the envy or the terror of bards. I come back and find all the old monarchs on their thrones, the same magazines on the same tables, the same singers piping the same prettinesses, the same literary ventures still buoyed up by the same advertisements, the same invalids, and the same quack medicines. Come, give an account of yourself. Where's *your* Epic? Was it that which bulged out all the pockets of the big Magdeburg over-coat?"

Champion took to laughing again and walking up and down the room, interspersing the laughter with occasional repetitions of some of the words Delafosse had used. "*My* Epic!" Then he would laugh.

"Quack medicines! Yes, yes." Then he would toss up his head wildly. "The same magazines! Exactly." But as to enlightening his host as to what he had himself been doing, there came not a word. But Delafosse was not in the humour to let him off, but went on putting a rapid succession of playful questions, yet questions which almost contained answers that were not very far off the truth. He had been writing articles in reviews, he said. Where? O, anywhere, everywhere. In the same old things; Delafosse knew where. No, he had not published his poems yet: did not know when he should. Had been offered the editorship of two papers, but in the provinces, and he could not write for rustics. Then he broke out into a long and furious, but rather comical, invective, in which almost every well-known literary name figured, and not one of them favourably. He then diverged from these to publishers, upon whom he poured out the phials of a

stuttering, but not ineloquent, and often extremely humoristic, wrath, finishing up with the remark:

"These fellows," meaning publishers, "in thinking they know anything about literature, make precisely the same mistake that would be made by a greengrocer were he to fancy himself a botanist."

Whereupon Delafosse, who was not at all of the same opinion, nevertheless laughed heartily, and went, very much amused, to bed. The other also retired to his room, but might have been heard tramping up and down the floor, ever and anon, for the next four hours.

CHAPTER IV.

A RAPID RETROSPECT.

SIR EUSTACE DELAFOSSE was long the talk of the town, and remained to the very last the terror of the country. When a fortune that, to his unreflecting mind, had once seemed illimitable, had shrunk to dimensions that straitened him round, and made him feel, at length, the force of a folly which could certainly now no further go, he altogether abandoned the capital, where he could no longer live as he had been accustomed to live, and where he was no longer particularly wanted now that he could not.

But change of sky brought no mutation to his mind, and what had been called his reckless and magnificent spirits in the metropolis, in the provinces were regarded as intolerable behaviour and erratic tendencies little short of madness. Yet women, who were the chief sufferers by his eccentric daring, stuck to him with their brave, kind tongues to the last; and so great could be the fascination of his manners, born with his blood and cultured among all that London had of best and most distinguished, that even the men who yesterday swore they would cut him in the hunting-field were to-morrow pressing him to their tables. So that when, one frosty October morning, they heard that the big, handsome, good-for-nothing athlete had been found dead asleep in his bed as calmly as a new babe, and could not be got to wake, they none of them said anything harsher than "Poor old boy! If Claribel had but lived, he might have come to some good."

Claribel had been for a short time Lady Delafosse, but soon lay as "Claribel, wife of Sir Eustace Delafosse, in the confident hope of a joyful resurrection," leaving baby-boy Everard to take his chance in a world where a mother's presence alone can make a child's chance anything like a good one. The father could not spend his time dandling the youngster in his burly arms; you might as well have asked him to nurse a feather. And as he had married Claribel, not because he had ever wanted to marry, but because he tumbled so terribly over head and ears in love with her that there was nothing else for it, there was no likelihood of his marrying a second time for the sake of her son. So the injury which this last had suffered by the loss of his mother, the father, in striving to console himself, day by day deepened, whilst preparing for him beforehand the loss of his fortune. He was at college when apprised of Sir Eustace's death, and of the further fact, that the

property which he thus inherited, though nominally one of twelve thousand a year, was reduced, by the incumbrances laid upon it by his father, to one of little more than three.

Everard at once hurried off to the Hold at Batterton, and never returned to college, though he had attained his majority but eight months previously, and had not taken his degree. He remained in England just long enough to ascertain the exact state of his affairs, and to satisfy himself that the agent of his property, though he had necessarily been at the mercy of his father's outrageous whims, was not only scrupulously honest, but a singularly good man of business. He then crossed the Channel and floated about the Continent, now in society, now in solitude, leaving everywhere the impression that he was very handsome, very fearless and frank, rather crotchety, unquestionably capable of doing great things, but very unlikely to do them. "I shall

draw on you," he had said to the agent, "to the extent of a thousand a year, and if I ask for more, mind you don't let me have it." He never drew quite to the full extent of the moderate limit which he had himself imposed, and the agent was left to the unchecked exercise of his talents in the application of what might still be fairly deemed Sir Everard's income.

After rather more than two years' uninterrupted absence, he visited England. He did not stay at Batterton, having come over solely for the purpose of seeing with his own eyes that things were going on as well as, in such involved circumstances, could be expected. Ignorant of London life, he devoted a season to its consideration if not to its enjoyment, and at the close of the summer again disappeared. Fashionable men and women had been curious to know who was the new arrival, whom only attachés, and foreigners, and folks who had lived much abroad, seemed at first to know;

but when his name was pronounced, the elder among them were readily able to solve the problem, by marvellous stories of the Sir Eustace, whose peculiarities were thus again remembered and related to a new generation. All agreed that he had little in common with his sire but an imposing appearance, and found him, if better behaved, by no means so interesting. The ensuing spring he was not in London; and so little impression had he made during the last, in a place impressionable now to few things but wealth or impudence, that he was not even asked for. By-and-by, however, as the season deepened, they began to talk about a book which had just appeared, and which interested them as it was at the same time interesting scholarly readers, though for a very different reason; and at last they might have been overheard saying, "Why, it is by that tall, quiet, good-looking young man, don't you remember, who was

here last year, son of the baronet about whom were told all those funny stories."

It was certainly a remarkable book. In the first place, it was different in form from anything that had been published for years, resembling in style the classical models so long neglected. It had, however, nothing in common with their calmness, still less with their coldness. It was polished but impetuous, measured but romantic, and sarcastic though with the sarcasm that did not despair of the possibility of better things. Many were outraged by its defiant frankness, all delighted with what they were pleased to call its terse and luminous periods. Some said that it was true, some that it was false; these that it was horribly unjust, those that it was not half outspoken enough. One side urged that it would do a great deal of good, the other that it was itself but an additional ingredient in the mischief which it professed to condemn. The truth

probably was, that its offensiveness and its literary merits were both overrated, and that all its critics were partly right and partly wrong. All, perhaps, however, were wrong in this: they failed to see in its pages the mind of a truth-loving young man, who, though with evidently strong capacity for hard hitting, would very soon devote himself to something better than literary pugilism, or end by doing nothing literary at all. For the present, however, they praised and abused him; and when at the close of June it got bruited abroad that he was in London, both what may be called the fashionable world, and what can scarcely be called the literary world, tried to get hold of him as they try to get hold of every annual curiosity. When he was not heard of in the one set, he was supposed by it to be captivated by the other; and while writers affected to wonder how he could stand those stupid swells, those stupid swells unaffectedly wondered how he could stand those writers

and artists. Truth to tell, he saw very little of either. One set he found rather deficient in manner, and the other totally deficient in matter. These last he soon abandoned altogether, and would probably have been in time equally lost to the former, had it not been for his genuine relish of Mrs. Narracott's society, and his genuine appreciation of Montagu Narracott's friendship. As for the book itself, it succeeded, and people looked and asked for more of the same sort. However, they did not get it. And after the successful work had gone through three editions, and copies were not to be had for money, the publisher could only inform fresh customers that its author, who held the copyright, could not be induced to print another edition. The author himself was on the Continent: he really did not know where. So that in a year or two more, both book and author were forgotten, except when some literary purist would crack up the former against less classical

performances, some enthusiastic captain of dragoons would pronounce it the cleverest book, by Jove, that was ever written, or some inquiring young lady expressed an eager desire to borrow and read it, only her mamma would not let her.

It was now three years since it had appeared; and had you now met Delafosse for the first time, you would have been puzzled to understand how he had ever written it. You caught its phraseology and its cadences sometimes in his conversation, and now and then heard the ring of a sentence that had a touch of the old battle-axe in it. But his tone of mind and his way of looking at things were so completely different from the tone and views of his only published performance, that you would have desired no cooler critic of it than himself. He had spent the intervening years in much seeing, more thinking, total abstention from writing, and but very moderate indulgence in reading. The kind of this

last had been entirely historical and scientific. Profounder causes, no doubt, such as a mind naturally large and liberal, had made him tolerant, but these had greatly assisted, at least, in justifying himself to himself for being so. But in proportion as he thought more, he did less. It is difficult for a man who sees both sides, to take either.

Ambrose Champion had known him first, now three years ago, when, to a superficial intimate, he seemed the likeliest man in the world to take a side and be of immense service to it. His conversation, like his book, spoke of things terribly wrong, and by some strong means or other to be righted; and along with this, though to a much smaller degree, was manifested the suspicion that he himself might possibly assist in the righting process. Two things chiefly had contributed to make the men apparently intimate, though most people wondered that they should know each other at all; for the external contrasts between them were

as marked three years ago as they were now. But Champion entertained, or professed to entertain, the highest opinion of Sir Everard's abilities, and Sir Everard found in him not only a companion who could give him a great deal of information which he himself wanted, but a sort of whetstone on which he could practise his pleasant wit, and play his inveterate part of banterer. Champion was always urging the young baronet to "do" something, write another book, or go into Parliament; giving him to believe that he could accomplish anything, if he would only try. He seemed to have as firm a faith in the young baronet's abilities as in his own, and this was no little. When Sir Everard, somewhat wearied with his importunity on these points, would betake himself to semi-serious chaff, and bluntly object that Champion had as yet "done" nothing himself, though it was quite certain that he had tried hard enough and was as ambitious as Lucifer, he would sometimes attribute his

failure to want of means, whilst sometimes he would affect to deny that he was ambitious any longer. He had been, perhaps, but he was sick of it. Who would care to excel in an age of pigmies, when so-and-so was poet laureate, such another prime minister, and Dick, Tom, and Harry, the pets of the nation ?

However much Delafosse had altered during the three years which marked the period of their acquaintance, and more especially during the last nine months of their unbroken separation, Ambrose Champion had not altered in the slightest. He was precisely the same man, only more intensely such. He was still the very antithesis of his host. He dressed disgracefully, ate like a monster, ran everybody down, pooh-poohed all living celebrities, and had no notion of conversation, but would harangue by the hour together. He had no taste of any sort, and, therefore, on the whole harangued badly. But he was brimful of

book-lore, was a good classic, and had the most awful passion for "knowing" of any man you ever met. He was bitterer than ever against the world which had not yet discovered him to be the genius which he was firmly convinced that he was. All this Delafosse perceived the very first night of their reunion, as described in the preceding chapter. To the same attempts to rouse him to "do" something as of old, Delafosse had answered with the same bantering question, why Champion was "doing" nothing himself, and had received the very same retorts about the age not being worth doing anything for. In that case, Delafosse had inquired, why should *he* bother himself to do anything? Delafosse always got the best of him in argument, simply because he was not sincere in what he said, and would always persist in taking up wrong, and often, inconsistent positions. He would then get up and walk wildly about the room, and declaim in such a pseudo-brilliant manner

that it required a good deal of cool critical confidence to pronounce most of it little better than nonsense.

He had never alluded to his own affairs, and if they were accidentally alluded to, he invariably turned away from them. Delafosse knew nothing whatsoever about him personally, either of his birth, his education, or his antecedents; and though naturally incurious about such matters, could not avoid occasionally speculating about what was so consistently concealed. No doubt, the less a man talks about his own family, the better. Still, I think your friends have some right on their side in wishing to know to what tribe you belong; and I have always thought that the proud unhappy girl answered justly no less than well, when, in answer to some one who excused himself for having harboured against her an unfounded suspicion, on the plea that he did not then know her, she replied: "No, but you knew my people!"

Sir Everard knew nothing of Champion's "people," and became only the more convinced either that there was something which was not fit to be known, or that Champion weakly strove to hide what only his own false pride imagined to be disgraceful. With regard to the strange man's own personal past, Sir Everard was convinced that he had started in life with an excessive estimate of himself, and no estimate at all of life's difficulties; that he had so far failed, and knew it, but would not give in, and yet was a bitterly disappointed man. What means he had, he made by his pen, though he was as secretive upon that subject as upon any other that regarded himself. It was pretty certain, however, that they were very slight, and would never be materially increased. Therefore Delafosse had always made him free of Batterton Hold when he had happened for brief periods to be there himself, and now that the young owner had come to stay for the entire summer at his ancestral home,

Champion soon appeared on the threshold, and was made welcome. He had the run of his host's place and the big old library, and was left to work at his leisure. His tastes, and they were odd enough, were never interfered with. He never went to bed before two or three, and yet he was always up at six, often before. He had never, he said, been able to court sleep, and he never felt the want of it. He had a horse, which was set apart for him, out at all hours from five in the morning till I know not what hour at night. Delafosse always looked for him at dinner; but beyond that understood arrangement, he was his own master.

This had been going on now for almost three weeks, during which Sir Everard himself was usually pretty well occupied, though in different pursuits from those of his guest. He had been highly gratified, on arriving in England this spring, to have the most cheering reports from his agent, and to find on personal inspection that the reports rather

underrated than overrated the results which his seven years' self-denial in expenditure had brought about. What with paying off mortgages and with judicious improvements, he found that the clear rental of his estates had improved, since his father's death, by fully a thousand pounds, and he was quite resolved to persist in the course which had proved so beneficial. It was for this reason that he had cut the garden clean in half, so as to diminish expenditure and augment production by the same blow; whilst at the same time he gratified his taste by leaving within the scope of pleasure only just so much ground as could be maintained in perfect order.

It may be difficult to account for the fact, but quite impossible to deny it, that we often take into our confidence the very people whom we trust the least, and from whom we the least expect anything like valuable counsel. It is only by some such explanation, joined perhaps to constant presence,

that we can account for Sir Everard saying anything to Ambrose Champion about Miss Swetenham. Perhaps, however, it came about in this way. Delafosse was asked to dine at The Slopes soon after Champion's arrival, and went, considering himself not at all pledged or hampered by his own guest, who treated him, and whom he treated, quite unceremoniously. On his return at night, he had, naturally enough, to give some account of his dinner, and of the people with whom he had been dining; and Champion, who was just as curious about other folks' affairs as he was reticent concerning his own, put cautious question after question, all of which the other answered carelessly enough, but with complete frankness. Mr. Swetenham was well off, then? and had a daughter? an only daughter? And she was pretty, and very charming, and Delafosse got on very well with her? Indeed. Had he ever given himself the trouble to think if she were worth marrying?

Champion did not appear ever to have mixed in anything that can properly be called society. His notions of women, about whom he was particularly fond of talking, appeared borrowed, in part, from Plato's "Republic;" but it was not easy to make out for certain whether he discoursed on the subject in order to express his own convictions, or to give his learning an airing. The State was often in his mouth, the Family never. Man was to lead a life of action for his own and civic purposes, and these purposes were to be subserved by women. And just as the Athenians regarded those as the best women who were the most healthy, and Napoleon those the best who were the most fruitful (in soldiers, of course), so he seemed to consider those the most valuable who had the most money. Attributing his own want of success to want of income, and seeing clearly enough that a man who is forced to devote himself to the earning of one will never do much else, he averred that they who want

to make a figure in the latter half of the nineteenth century ought to have plenty of money themselves, or ought to marry rich wives. But, as usual, he directed his remarks, when in conversation upon this topic, more towards Sir Everard's interests than his own. This last had only to ally himself with somebody who could clear, or help clear, his estates of their incumbrances, and—to use his favourite phrase—the trick was done. How much had old Swetenham? Delafosse really did not know, but had heard that he had had some sixty thousand pounds once left him by a brother. Forthwith, Champion was all for his going in and winning the daughter. Now, whatever were really his feelings for Miss Swetenham, of which we can judge only by the brief conversation with Mrs. Narracott in the first chapter, they were certainly of the purest and least mercenary kind. Champion took no notice of his assertions on this point, but urged and urged that his tide had come, and

that if taken now it would lead on to fortune. Argument, and expostulation, and repudiation of any such views, or of any hankering after fortune's favours or ambition's supposed rewards, had only the effect of proving to Champion that the other had entertained the notion of some day marrying her. He had been annoyed at Delafosse's not taking him about and introducing him to people. He had a mania for making acquaintances, and yet seemed to know hardly anybody. It was evident that he was particularly anxious to know the family at The Slopes. But really the man was not fit to take into any quiet family. He contradicted everybody, and got the word and harangued straight on end till midnight. Once when they were out riding together, they met Mr. and Miss Swetenham. Delafosse introduced him, but here it ended. He never took his guest over, and never offered to take him.

He himself meanwhile was going there rather oftener than before; indeed I think he

had been there once every week during the month that Champion had now been staying with him. Was it Lily, and Lily only, that drew his horse's rein in that direction? To judge rightly, we must know a little more of the past than there has yet been time to tell. When he was at The Hold during the preceding year, he had visited The Slopes three times in all, and each time she had interested him enormously. He had noticed —who could fail to notice?—what dear, good, excellent, but conventional, orthodox, and unoriginal people, both the clergyman and his wife and their friends all were. But he had noticed, or fancied that he had noticed, what most people would certainly have not remarked, that the daughter, however outwardly compliant with their opinions and externally harmonious with their ways, occasionally dropped indefinite expressions, and did indefinite things, to lead him to suspect that she led another dearer life in life within her own breast, in addition to the one

spent upon the domestic hearth. One never likes to think a girl "deep;" but the phrase is more offensive than its genuine meaning. Supposing that Lily Swetenham regarded life as a larger, and at once more earnest and more entertaining piece of business than her parents and her neighbours regarded it, and that these could prevent her from carrying out her ideas, but could not prevent her from having them, was there anything blameworthy in her practical avoidance of the question? The young are no better for having to repress either their opinions or their feelings; but if they be forced to suppress them—how then? Was there to be a constant row in the house? Such were the conclusions about her at which Sir Everard arrived; but he could not feel any certainty that he was right.

Philip Pemberton had been there, last year as now, on every occasion, and impressed Delafosse with the notion that he was decidedly enamoured of the young

lady, whilst it likewise seemed as if the parents looked on approvingly. For all that, in a way impossible to describe, she was saucy to him and treated him badly. Still it was so delicately done, Delafosse owned to himself, that had she treated him similarly, he would have been at a loss what to do. If you had asked him how she treated him, he really could not have told you. He could only have said that, though nothing of any kind occurred, he had seemed to be getting nearer to her every time that he saw her. On the occasion of the second of the three visits of last year, they had had an unspoken indefinable "tiff" about something, and were "different" for the remainder of the evening. Delafosse had felt that there was something wrong, and he had been sorry for it. He had pressed her hand, at parting, more warmly than usual. More warmly had she pressed his, and then had rushed up to her eyes an intense, inquisitive look such as he had never seen there before. The third

of the three visits was avowedly a farewell one, previously to his departure for the Continent. Lily said nothing and did nothing that Delafosse could have explained even to himself; but he felt as though she was tenderness itself to him the whole time. Though, of course, they were no nearer to each other than usual, he felt as though they were nestling side by side. He was not the man to imagine that sort of thing, and he knew that he was not. It was all Lily's own doing; but how she did it, he could not conceive.

He went abroad, having her image floating about in his mind, and on his return to Batterton this spring, he was curious and even anxious to see her. He went over to The Slopes shortly after his arrival, and was received, though kindly, yet he thought not quite so cordially as of yore, by Mr. and Mrs. Swetenham. Miss Swetenham seemed just a little nervous when she first entered; but in a moment or two she appeared to

him more like the rest of the world than he had ever seen her appear before. The only thing to remind him of former times was the old close pressure of the hand. He went home in rather a disturbed temper, and somewhat disgusted with himself.

Very shortly after, however—in fact, but a day or two before Champion's arrival—they all drove over to The Hold, and were shown by Sir Everard the alterations which had been made, or which he proposed making. Within a quarter of an hour the old cordiality had returned, and he had an opportunity of asking Miss Swetenham if anything had occurred during his absence to cause a change of friendliness towards him on the part of her parents.

"No, nothing," she answered; "only afraid of your influence. You see it is all right now."

There was no chance of inquiring further, and indeed there scarcely seemed any necessity for doing so. He concluded, and in

all likelihood very soundly, that he had been frequently discussed during his long absence, and that apart from any other facts telling against him, that very absence betokened to them a restless vagrant disposition, very alien to their own fixed domestic ways. The sight of his establishment, together with his statement that he henceforth intended to be more upon the spot, operated at once vastly in his favour. Philip Pemberton then, for the first time, formally called, and Sir Everard upon him, and though the former had improved, the latter could not help thinking him, though a very good fellow, rather of the genus "muff." Muff or not, he was, Delafosse soon discovered, generally considered to be engaged, virtually if not actually, to Miss Swetenham. Then, for the first time also, did the young Lord of Batterton find, if the babble of the people about could be trusted, that the Vicar of Rymington was a much richer man than he had ever imagined. Never inquiring into

his neighbours' affairs, he rarely knew anything about them; and hoodwinked by his experience, which had brought him across people who invariably lived pretty well up to their income, he was not likely to divine that the modest tenant of The Slopes, who certainly did not spend there more than eight hundred a year, was probably worth four times that sum. Sir Everard's wishes, in as far as they clustered about the daughter, led him to try to disbelieve it; but the proof, arising out of the brother's legacy, was too strong to leave room for doubting.

All this he had communicated to, or had wormed out of him by Champion, who still remained, undisturbed, at Batterton. Sir Everard had twice written pressingly to Montagu Narracott, asking him and his wife to come and stay. When he had been in town, they had cheerfully promised to visit him, and had expressed their delight at the prospect. She should be charmed to smell

the fields once more, and he should feel the advantage of a week or two's quiet, during which he should make famous progress with his new story. All the more, therefore, was Delafosse surprised, when, to his first letter he received a hurried reply, saying that they could not come just now, and to the second a longer, but it seemed to him a formal letter, containing an explanation, lame and unsatisfactory, why they could not come. However, it was no use asking them again. They would come when they wanted, he thought; which surely would be soon. It was the middle of July, and London would soon be unendurable. In the country it was delicious; and what better could he do, this sweet summer eve, than mount his chesnut, and canter over to The Slopes?

CHAPTER V.

HAND IN HAND.

All the freshness of the year had departed, but all its fruitfulness had nearly arrived. There were no green grasses, no blossoming hedges, no cuckoo notes, no shower-answering shoots. But the plum was ripening on the wall; the nut had ceased to swell and was fast hardening in the brake; and the fields were golden and waiting to be garnered. "Alas!" thought Delafosse, "is Nature sent to be our reproach? My freshness has likewise gone; but my

season of fertility seems farther away than ever!"

With such sobering and admonishing thoughts he rode on and on till he saw the ivied tower of Rymington dark among the lighter elms. He did not, as was his wont, ride through the main entrance, but he left his horse at the stable and sauntered back into the churchyard, to see if the tombstone of a faithful old butler of his father's who there lay buried, was free from invading grass and lichen. Having satisfied himself on this pious point, he made for the path which ended in the little wire gate through which Mrs. Pemberton and her party had entered when we were last at Rymington. He, too, went through it, and, casting a look around him, he thought that he could perceive within the courteous and inclining shelter of a weeping ash near to the little ait in the river, the colour and even the folds of a lady's dress. He made quietly for it and looked in. It was Lily. She started and

coloured slightly, but immediately regained complete self-possession.

"Sir Everard! How good of you to come and see us! It must be rather terrible work, riding this hot day. You see I am in the coolest place I could find."

"So you are, and a more delicious one I could not conceive;" and he sank pleasantly down into a low wicker seat, with his long legs stretching along the turf, and not far from where she sat on the higher octangular bench which surrounded the trunk of the umbrageous tree. "But much as I enjoy this 'contiguity of shade,' all 'summer heat' is to me more or less 'fantastic;' I never feel too warm."

"You have lived so much in Italy."

"True, but I do not think that has had much to do with it. You cannot charge Italy with *that* bad habit of mine, since love of a blazing sun is not my second nature but my first."

"*I* have never charged you with any bad

habits, that I know of," she answered, laying great stress on the pronoun, yet without at all implying by the tone that anybody else had done so.

He chose to understand her, however, in that sense.

"Quite true." And he looked with demonstrative but playful vigilance all round, dived his hand deep into his breast-pocket, and left it there for the moment. "Quite true; but I have some bad habits, though *you* have never charged me with them. And where are they who have? I do not see any of them. So, may I? I know *you* are tolerant." And the end of a cigar-case just peered out of the pocket. "One little stray weed?"

"Certainly: I like it."

"Just to keep one alive against this dead heat. Not a cigar, but a cigarette—a thing of straw—only; bearing the same relation to a cigar that your tiny little nimbus does to this huge imposition." And he took off his hat, placed it by her side, bowed his

thanks for her gracious permission, and lighted his cigarette.

"And is it much hotter in Italy?"

"Much, very much, and with less to shelter you."

"And is it lovelier?"

"Yes, lovelier, much lovelier—if not so pretty. It is so completely different. Everything there is superficial, so to speak, and yet intense. There seems to be nothing under it, so unreal is it; yet what a glow upon the surface! Here everything is quiet, but profound. One cannot for one's life fancy an English landscape becoming an unsubstantial pageant faded; but if Italy's *not* cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces were suddenly to dissolve, it would seem to you, as a spectator, the most natural thing in the world. Our views, when they disappear, always leave, and seem as if they must leave, at least a mist behind."

"And which do you like best?"

"As long as you use only the word 'like,'

Italy must bear off the palm. But if you were to use the word 'love," I think England would prevail. You can get so much nearer to English scenery; in fact, it is nearly always all foreground. There is no distance at all. It is homey, and earthy, like oneself, and not out of reach. You can get at it, and find fault with it, and abuse it —which, in love, I believe goes for a great deal——"

"I suppose so," she said, rather regretfully.

"And abuse it, ay and alter it, and do with it pretty much as you will. In a word, you feel as if it belonged to you for better for worse, and would—if sometimes churlishly, always in the end, somehow—obey you."

"And Italy is so different ?"

"The very antithesis. It is all background and distance and horizon. Most of it is in the air, a good deal of it actually in the sky. Nothing is near or real, except the bit of

ground you have got your foot on. What are you going to do with those sinuous, soft, retreating hills, with those undulating far-reaching purple valleys, with those dark but distant forests, and those ether-belonging peaks fining off into the atmosphere beyond them? Love such an air-scape? You cannot get hold of it; you cannot make anything of it. It is not, like oneself, earthy at all; it is celestial, and is—as children are sometimes told when they are brought down to dessert—for us to look at, not to touch."

"And the cities are still more different, are they not?"

"Almost, I think; and then there are so many of them. How many municipi do you imagine there are in Italy? Eight thousand, and each one of them has something to say for itself; has a tale of its own; has heard of battles, and in its time has followed to the field some warlike lord. Most of them have their cathedral, many of them excellent libraries, the majority a painter or sculptor

or deft-handed man of some sort to whom they have given his second name. And though you see a certain amount of dirt, and occasionally of squalor, you see nothing vulgar. Their tumble-down houses or tattered garments are like cobwebs or crows in pictures, introduced by the artist to give effect and verisimilitude."

"And there you feel at home more; less lost, I mean, than in the large, lustrous, open country."

"Yes, a little. Still people would feel more lonely, when alone in Italy, than in England. Perhaps that accounts for the Italians being such a sociable people."

There was a pause. He had smoked his cigarette, and he threw the end into the river. Away it went, slowly like its bearer, round the ait, and slowly on like the effect of the converse just held, away to where it could no longer be followed. There were ripples just heard, and shadows of the ash

scarcely moving, and silence, and the summer afternoon.

"How much I should like to go there!" she said at length.

Sir Everard, mesmerised by the stream on which he was gazing, answered as one answers when spoken to in a dream.

"And how much I should like to take you!"

He did not know that he had said, and probably would never have remembered, by awaking to the consciousness, that he had said something rather strange, had she not replied, as soon as the words were out of his mouth, in a quick decisive manner:

"I wish I could induce papa to go."

She had dexterously saved him from his own unintentional excessive freedom of speech.

"And can you not?" he asked, too glad to get away from a blunder to recur to it. "If you tried hard I should think you might.

If I happened to be in Italy, I should be very glad to be of service, in suggesting routes and giving hints."

"I very much fear you will never have the chance of doing us any such service. We are like what you say English scenery is like, exceedingly homey."

"And a very good thing to be."

"Are you going to try to be it, Sir Everard?"

"I should fail so hopelessly if I tried, unless I were very strongly backed, and had some one to help me constantly, that I think I had better leave it alone."

"And you intend to remain distant and celestial—all horizon, in fact?"

When a girl banters a man, be sure that she is either rather angry with him, or despises him very heartily. There was nothing despicable about this man sitting below her. How had he annoyed her, then? He turned his face full towards her.

"I thought you were laughing at me, but

at any rate you hide your mirth. *Was* there anything so very absurd in my comparison of the two countries?"

"Nothing at all," she replied, seriously enough. Then she smiled, or seemed to smile, and added, "But was there anything so very absurd in my comparing you to the horizon?"

"No, perhaps not, for I dare say I am sketchy and irregular enough. It was the 'celestial' that made me fear I had made myself ridiculous."

How men do dread being ridiculed! Any one of them will, if he have the wit, banter a woman by the hour together, and she of course stands fire unflinchingly. But should she be unwise enough to retaliate, he strikes his flag on the instant, or steams straight off to sea.

"I did but accept your language, and should be only too happy if I could apply it to myself, since you do not seem to wish to appropriate it. There may possibly be no

place like home, but surely there are other places ?"

"And you would like to see them ?"

"I should like to see everything, know everything, do everything," she broke out with sudden ardour; "I hate being cramped, and small, and ignorant. I value life, I think it a glorious gift, a thing to be done ever so much with; and nobody here sees, or is likely to see that it is so, except myself. Dear papa, when he preaches so well about the 'talents,' has not the faintest notion that Rymington is little better than a napkin!"

His brows were knit over his eyes, and he was staring silently, and with a look of wonder, at a face that, now that she had ceased speaking, no longer betrayed the slightest sign of excitement. Rapid and instantaneous as a galvanic shock, the influence which had a moment moved her, left her apparently as little affected as before.

"But you do unwisely," he said, at length,

"if you undervalue the haven of the hearth. Outside it are strong unsympathising waves, and storms swift to surprise, and horrible rocks lying in ambush, and ugly collisions, and not a bit of shelter, and scarce a friendly sail anywhere. Do not, Miss Swetenham, underrate your home."

"I do not underrate it. I love these dear Slopes, and I need not say how dearly those who make it still dearer. But are false extremes the only possible positions? May one not leave home for a time, and make acquaintance with the bigger home which I suppose belongs to all of us—even to us small ones, Sir Everard? Or, what would also somewhat satisfy me, cannot some of that bigger home be admitted into the little one, so that we may travel a good distance even without going beyond that wire gate."

"Is this a new longing of yours, or have you always felt it?"

"I have always felt it," she answered. "I should imagine that we all begin by

feeling it, and that not feeling it is the artificial, not the natural state. They say that children cry for the moon; and how can we blame them, since they do not know that they cannot get it? And I think one may justifiably remain childish enough to the last to long for the best thing that one *can* get."

"And you are such a child?"

"I hope so."

"I hope so too. All I can say is, go on longing for the best thing you can get, and you will very likely end by getting it."

"There, Sir Everard, you spoke like a man, in complete forgetfulness of a woman's condition. Women *never* get their best, unless that best be a very small good indeed. But it is something, at least, to desire it."

It looked as though she did not despise him in the least, but was rather afraid lest he should despise her; and probably the lightness of his tone, even on serious subjects, such indeed as clever men usually adopt

towards girls, had outraged her first into bantering him back, and next into blurting out what she had certainly never blurted out to anybody before. Very likely he now saw something of this himself, and therefore it was that he said somewhat judicially and as though he were summing-up their talk:

"Do not run away with the idea that I do not agree with what you say: I objected for the sake of hearing your reasons. I differ from you only on this point, and shall persist in differing from you: that I do not take such a desponding view as you take of the possibility of your excellent longings being somehow indulged."

"I see no prospect . . . . I am going to see if mamma is in the drawing-room. Will you stay here, or will you come?"

"I will go with you."

They went together, and such an evening was spent within as is spent when a man of original and heterodox views, but of cour-

teous caution, has to spend it with two people of the most regular opinions, and considerably older than himself. Miss Swetenham was there also, it is true; but, save when she sang, her presence was of small account. You would not have had her talk as we overheard her talking underneath the weeping tree, so she scarcely talked at all. When she did speak, she spoke much worse and more stupidly than any of the other three, inasmuch as two of these had discoursed conventionally for so long a time that they did it about as well as the thing can be done, and the third was sufficiently man of the world to produce a decent imitation. The ceremony was, however, beginning to flag, and yet it was too early for Delafosse to offer to go.

"And you did not know that the Pembertons were at the sea-side?" said Mrs. Swetenham. They had quite exhausted all the possibilities of conversation on this subject, but here, in despair of other and in

horror of silence (how stupid people do dread a pause!), here it was again. How Sir Everard wished the clock would point to nine, or that again he was under the ash by the little ait in the river. "That they had gone to Shinglesea?"

"No, I did not. I fear I see but little of my neighbours. Is it a pretty place?"

"We don't know. They have run down there to judge. If they like it, we shall all go there together in the autumn."

"Here it is," said Miss Swetenham, advancing from the other end of the room. "I have found that book of views of which I spoke, and here is a sketch of Shinglesea."

She seated herself by him at the centre table, and together they began turning over the leaves, and, like a couple of babies, looking at the pictures. And they were this much worse than babies, that the pictures did not interest him, and she knew it, and he knew that she knew it. Yet how was it? He began to forget all about the clock, and to

feel as though they were under the umbrageous branches, and to feel a something that he had not felt, even when really there. How was it?

A dear kind old sage of my acquaintance has a very simple test for that much-debated thing ordinarily called Love. We all know how often it is disputed about, how its nature is variously represented, and how it is never successfully defined to the satisfaction of everybody. Can you, man or woman, sit at one end of the room whilst he or she, the supposed object of your affections, is sitting at the other end, without wanting to go over there? If you can, be sure, says my sage, you are not in love. If you cannot, a million to one the exacting passion has you in its clutches.

I humbly submit that he is right. And if he be, can we not erect another, though a weaker test, by the question, And how do you feel when you accidentally find yourself

in the same corner, on the same sofa, chair by chair let us say?

It was very dull, and the views—you have seen them a thousand times—were weak in subject and weaker still in execution, and there was a good deal of turning over, when——

When what? On the faith of an author, it began by sheer accident. There was no malice in it. It was all the book, and the table, and the turning over, but their hands somehow once got very close, and there was not room to take them away, and then there seemed as if there were less room and less, and that their hands were nearer and nearer, and hers I suppose were very soft, and his at last masculinely confident, and the views appeared to be very interesting, and it struck nine, and Sir Everard Delafosse did not offer to go. At length, however, Lily rose, looked him through with a gaze too piercing to have anything in it of affectionate, and left the

room. He rose and talked to Mr. and Mrs. Swetenham for about five minutes, at the end of which she returned, looking about as calm as the north pole. Warmly, however, she returned his warm pressure at parting. He flung himself into the saddle, forgetting to tip the groom—wonderful for *him*—and rode off home in a fever.

So little—indeed nothing—tangible had hitherto passed between them, that this which some would regard as a very small affair, assumed the proportions of a very mighty matter. And then be it said that this man, in his relations with women, was in intention at least, and in conviction, the very soul of honour. The warm reckless blood of his father flowed in his veins; but he knew all that father's history, with its consequences both to sire and son, not yet ended. Again, he was terrible in his taste, and as the only women whom his taste would ever have permitted him to admire were invariably the women who would

never suffer an unseasonable trespass, habit had so long gone hand in hand with resolution, that he would never have dreamed beforehand of taking furtively captive the hand of a girl between whom and himself no love-word had ever passed, nor, having accidentally taken it, dream that such an occurrence could end where it had begun. Rightly or wrongly—rightly, I deem—he considered, as he sat swaying in his saddle, that he had, to all intents and purposes, told Lily Swetenham that he wanted to marry her, and she, to all intents and purposes, told him that, for her part at least, there would be no obstacles to his doing so.

And did he regret this hasty, silent, unpremeditated betrothal? That was a question not so rapidly to be decided. What did he know of her? Before to-day, absolutely nothing: and to-day, nothing but what her few sentences by the water-side had told him.

And what was that? That she was a girl

with large aspirations and what she considered but a very poor out-look: one who chafed under the real *res angusta domi*, the narrowness of home, and who would emerge if she ever had the chance. One, then, with a large soul, or with capacities for becoming large, and who, so far, in behaviour at least, had accepted the shortness of her tether, and had not tugged at it so as to provoke compassion or further restraint, and in either case so as to injure herself. One, therefore, who united noble, restless longings with a serene sense of practical duty. A rare combination, surely. He had not intended to do what he had done, but he really could not regret it.

It was two years or more since he had come to the conclusion that it would be well for him to marry, if he could. But the more the wish to marry is based upon reflection and conviction, and the less upon mere impulse, the more difficult is it for a man to find one whom, always supposing

that he could win her, his head would accept at the instigation of his heart. It is time to insist upon a moral truth, not only usually disregarded, but by most people denied, that in this matter of love, sentiment has no more right to unshackled supremacy than in any other concern of life. The heart is an excellently good genius, and often suggests what is the best thing to do; but the reason is sovereign, and can alone authorise final action on the part of impulse. This is no cold, chilling creed, but merely the assertion of an important doctrine, that between the intellect and the passions there should never be even temporary estrangement, much less permanent divorce. They are the co-urgent wings to steady the flight which is otherwise but fluttering and spasmodic.

Sir Everard had necessarily seen, in his wanderings, many girls to whom a young man's heart might easily have warmed. Fair faces are there yet in plenty, fair forms

still abound, and all that is gracious gathers around the sisters of our friends just the same as of old. Whilst yet in our teens, we indulge as far as we can in such sweet things, knowing that we are yet too young and too light in the purse to be brought to account. But when responsibility comes with manhood and so much a year, we look, and admire, and praise, but think some not very [redacted] yet quite fatal, "but," and turn away. Blue eyes are still blue, and long lashes still rather disturbing; little feet retain all their fascination, and a voice, "gentle and low," goes straight home, and dwelleth in the memory. But the years of man may be threescore and ten, and how would that sweet, soft, simpering face wear through the forty and odd yet remaining to us? Would those eyes face much peril, and could those little feet do any mountain climbing? Lilian thinks, or says she thinks, that the majority of mankind will be [redacted] for ever, and I

don't. Kathleen adores shop-windows, and you worship in the fields. Zacyntha has not a sous-piece and never will have, but comes of a very fruitful stock; and he, poor swain, has three hundred a year, and is the only man of his name who has even that much. Go your way in such case, not rejoicing, since, perhaps, such is impossible, indeed sorrowing for a little time, if you cannot help it. But bear up, my brave! you will pull round. You have done the right thing, and *that* will wear through all your remaining years, even should you live to be as old as Methuselah; *that* will face any amount of peril for you, and no steep paths will ever find *it* weak in the wind.

I learned these doctrines from the same source as Sir Everard, and he used to put them in the above form, and so I prefer it to any more solemn periods of my own, because his conduct is in question at present, and not mine. He rode very slowly, for he was wanting to find out if he had

made a deplorable blunder, or been directed to a happy accident. What was it that he wanted in a wife? A good many things, I fear, but they are easily enumerated. A person sufficiently agreeable, a finished manner, a liberal, expansive, tolerant intelligence, either money or very inexpensive tastes, and reverence. That she had the first and second, he had recognised the very first moment he saw her, and had never seen reason since to modify his first judgment. He had recently been made aware that her father was a man of substance, and in any case the daughter had yet to acquire habits that were costly. To-day, for the first time, had he found any special reason to credit her with a mind sufficiently open and free from timidity not to shrink and shut at sight of the rebellious novelties which had found hospitality within his; but what he had this day found was, he thought, quite enough to assure him upon that score. There remained, then, but the

attribute of reverence, of respect for the things not ours, for the past, for the other side, that second sight which sees "good in everything." Probably she did not possess it to any very great extent, perhaps she did not possess it at all—how few people do! But, if that were all that was wanting, he could give her that, and, in trying to give it, double it in himself. He rather wished that some other occurrence had forced him to ask himself these questions, that the position had been brought about differently; but since he thus found himself in it, he could not for his life be sorry for it. And I think the very words he used, as at last he urged his horse into a sharp trot, were:

"Yes, I love her. . . . On, old man!"

And the clatter of the hoofs on the high road rang in the summer night. Soon, however, they were no longer heard, or gave out only a dead unechoing thud. He was riding on turf, under trees, through gates, now and then (cautiously, for it was not

over light) over low fences and narrow sunken stream-paths, now quite dry, and from which came no murmur of running water.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, suddenly; "a light in old Hannah's window! What an extraordinary thing!" He took out his watch. "Yes, it is after eleven: *very* strange!"

Should he knock and go in? But all seemed quiet. He rode close to the door and listened: not a sound. He looked up at the illumined window: part of the shadow of a person at rest was thrown on the blind. It could not be Hannah. Indeed, he knew she slept down stairs. Perhaps it was some one, some relation, some niece from the north, who had come to see her, though she certainly never encouraged visitors. He would ride on, and ask about it to-morrow. Just as he was turning away, the shadow on the blind moved, and grew into the proportions of a

full female figure. Certainly not old Hannah's. It moved again, disappeared, and came back again. It was a shadow thrown by youth, or he was a clumsy observer. He thought he heard some one humming. He went closer again, and listened. By Jove! an air out of a new opera he himself had heard when in London for a few days at the beginning of the season. It was hummed—nothing more; and in a manner that bespoke merely a correct ear. Any operatic air in that little cottage in that big wood was odd enough: but an air from the last opera!

"Whoever she may be, I can't disturb her," he said, and broke into a gallop along the grassy path that split the dark woodland distinctly in twain.

CHAPTER VI.

A TENANT AT WILL.

THE very next morning at breakfast, Delafosse told Champion exactly what had occurred, and declared his determination of at once putting it to the touch to win or lose it all.

On hearing the news and his host's resolution, he was, at first, more thoughtful and cautious in his speech than usual. He got up and walked about, but did not declaim.

"But I thought you said it is the universal opinion that she is to marry Philip Pem-

berton, and that you yourself are quite sure that he wants to marry her and that her parents approve his desires?"

"So I am. But I am now equally sure that she never will."

"Don't be too certain. And even supposing she refuses to marry him, and sticks to her refusal, her parents may be equally obstinate in refusing to allow her to marry you."

"That's true; indeed, probable. And that is precisely why I should like to have the matter settled."

"Would she run away with you, do you think, if they refused their consent?"

"I don't care to know. I would not run away with her—not, at least, till I had had long and thorough proof that she loved me without the slightest fear of change on her part, or the slightest hope of change on theirs."

Again Champion was silent and thoughtful. When he spoke it was to try to show

the other that he was altogether in the wrong. Delafosse told him rather abruptly that he did not understand such matters, and that his views upon them were not very chivalrous. He was not in the least offended, but argued against Sir Everard all the more perseveringly the more obstinate he grew. At last Champion said:

"Well, if you won't run away with her, you won't. But although you may be too chivalrous to do a wise thing, there is no necessity for your volunteering to do an absurd one."

"And what might that be?"

"Why, proposing to, or at least for, her before she has refused Pemberton. As long as her parents are not convinced that she will not marry him, you have not the slightest chance of being accepted by them."

"But if *she* accepts me—which, indeed, I consider she has done already?"

"They won't; being sure to hope to be

able to overcome her preference for you as long as they are not aware of the strong objection to him."

Delafosse had never heard him talk so sensibly before. He himself was for the moment a little excited; but what the other now urged was so manifestly discreet that he could not refuse his assent.

"But what can I do? In honour I must do something."

"Do? Why, make Pemberton propose."

"When?"

"At once, my good fellow . . . I mean," he added quickly, "within the next three weeks. Of course you cannot settle matters in a day."

"And at present he is at Shinglesea, and will not be home for a fortnight or three weeks."

"That is all the better," said Champion, hastily.

"Why all the better?"

"Not all the better," he answered, turning away. "I did not mean that—only that it does not matter. In fact, if he will not be back, it cannot be helped, and you must wait. However, make him propose when he does return."

"But how am I to make him?"

"Simply by telling him that if he doesn't, you will. That will bring him to."

Delafosse thought it over, and turn it which way he would, Champion's plan seemed not only admirable but necessary. Certainly, if anything further occurred—and something further must shortly occur—between him and Lily, he should feel bound to avow his affection to her parents. He was not the man to live long under a table. All he could do was to avoid its neighbourhood till Pemberton's return.

In the afternoon, when some of the day's sultry heat had waned, he rode over to old Hannah's cottage. Situation more secluded without looking at all lonely could not be conceived. Woods girt it all about, but it

had swept round for itself almost a circle of open sward, from the northern half of whose circumference narrow leafy bridle-paths struck off like the continuation of radii. The southern half, or rather less than half, was feathery with younger trees. The cottage itself was approached from the north, and on that side presented a picturesque but not otherwise inviting or home-like appearance. But on its secluded side which fronted the south, and the unbroken ring of yet growing timber, woodbine and clematis ran rival riot, and good old-fashioned cabbage-roses, big and sweet-scented and demonstrative, gratified the eye and delighted the scent, to the utmost limit of the grassy enclosure. Hannah was sitting in the doorway as Sir Everard approached. She was not absolutely blind, but so much so as to be obliged to trust more to her hearing, which was good enough, than to her sight.

"Well, Hannah, how are you? You have visitors with you, have you not?"

"O, it's you, Sir Everard, is it? Why I'm much as usual, thank'ee, Sir Everard; very blind and not good for much."

"You are good for a great deal yet, Hannah, never you mind."

"Nay, nay, Sir Everard, good for nothing, for less than nothing. It's high time I deed. When folk can't wark, it's time for 'em to dee."

"But you do work, and as I said, you have got visitors, have you not?"

"Nay, not visitors—lodgers."

"Lodgers!"

"Ay, lodgers, Sir Everard. I wanted none on 'em, you may be sure. But she was such a fair-spoken lady, and went on so, and wouldn't have nay, and offered such a lot o' money—twenty-five shilling a week—that I was like to let her come, and her maid wi' her. And they don't trouble me much. I see nought on 'em."

"And what is the lady like, Hannah? Old, young, or what?"

"Well, Sir Everard, you know I don't see ower well—I don't see you, Sir Everard, as I should like to see you—but I'd think she war young enough, though not so very young."

"And what's her name?"

"Nay, I cannot tell you. The servant's name is Prinsep, or some such fine-fangled name, but we always calls *her* the mistress."

"And how long have they been here?"

"A fortnight, come Monday, Sir Everard."

The cottage was his, and Hannah was his tenant, but that did not justify him in intruding upon her lodgers. He turned his horse's head.

"Well, good day, Hannah. I thought it might be one of your married daughters that had come to see you."

"Nay, I have to go and see *them*, when I do see 'em."

"But why do they not come to you?"

"They're ower old, I reckon."

He smiled at the notion of this centenarian thinking her own children, whom she went occasionally to see, "ower old" to come and see her, and rode off. But when he had gone a short distance, it occurred to him that whoever was the person who had taken the whim of lodging in a place, though so charming, necessarily so inconvenient, he could be doing no harm, and, indeed, would be paying a civility, if he went in and offered what assistance The Hold could give, to one who was no doubt only a passing visitor in quest of health and temporary quiet. So he turned head again and rode back.

Hannah was no longer in the doorway. He fastened his horse securely to a strong bit of old oak paling, and went, not through the cottage, but round it. When he had reached the other side, he saw a slim female figure at the farther end of the plot, cutting off dead roses. As he walked towards her, she turned to another tree, having evidently finished her labour on the last.

"Miss Raffles!"

"Yes, Sir Everard! In the howling wilderness, or 'abandoned wilderness'—which was it?—that you recommended me. You see I have determined to try and do something not 'poor and superficial;' but in order to attain what you encouraged me to do, I have of course been obliged to adopt the only means by which you assured me it could possibly be done. I am solitary enough here, surely?"

"Yes, indeed, but you might have found a place more comfortable, without injuring your chance of producing something rich and profound."

"But you yourself, Sir Everard, told me of old Hannah's cottage, and spoke of it as the very place for the purpose."

"I was only bantering."

"And bantering equally about the 'wilderness,' and the solitude, and the poor and superficial work, and the trying to do something better? Was it all banter? If so,

you ought to give me some compensation, for it was your advice which led me into the terrible expense of coming, to say nothing of the twenty-five shillings a week which I have been obliged to give Hannah, in order to induce her to admit me at all."

"I told you what I really believed, when I said that London was hostile to great literary endeavour, and that solitude was a more favourable condition. But I was certainly bantering when I recommended this lodge in some vast wilderness."

"And you are sorry"—and back went the little head, and farther back the short-cut undulating glossy golden curls—"you are sorry that I have found it out. You do not like me for a neighbour, though you see I have been here nearly a fortnight without disturbing you, and I do not think you would have ever known that I was here if you had not come purposely to see who it was."

"I am not in the least sorry, Miss Raffles.

Indeed, I only regret, since you resolved to come here, that you didn't let me know that you were coming, in order that I might have sent a servant down from The Hold beforehand to prepare this little place for you. It really must be very primitive."

"Charmingly so; it is everything that I could desire. I am as happy in it as the day is long, and I work with a will, and am going to do as you told me, and write everything straight out of me, let publishers and people say what they choose."

"But how do you manage with regard to more mundane matters? How is the housekeeping contrived? Because you have literally chosen the 'desert for a dwelling-place.'"

"But then I have 'one fair spirit for my minister.' I brought my servant with me, who can do everything on earth, from plain cooking to fancy needlework, and keeps Hannah in moderately good humour all the time."

"And does that complete your establishment?"

"Yes. I know what you mean. You want to know if I have not some aged female relative, grandmother, deaf aunt, dragon, gorgon, all the furies, with me. No, not a single frown or false curl anywhere. You are astonished, though you are too polite or too kind to say so."

"Not at all. I am a believer in liberty, for those who prove themselves worthy of it."

"And then, an authoress can do anything. It is worth while for a woman to write a book, in order to have the privilege of being allowed a little more latitude in the matter of pleasing herself. But tell me (shall we sit here, it is in the shade: oh! how charming it is!), have *you* done nothing since I saw you in London? There is no excuse for you, if you have not. You have plenty to say that has never been said before, marvellous facility for saying it, entire leisure, and the

wilderness wedded to the comforts of your own, I doubt not, admirable home."

"For all that, I have done nothing. Day by day does the truth come more and more forcibly home to me, of what Goethe was never tired of saying, viz. That no youth can be a master. I am not, it is true, in extreme youth, but I am still too young to teach."

"But youth can ask questions. You have already asked many, and the most suggestive ones I ever read, and so can teach at least indirectly."

"There is dexterity, and perhaps justice in your first remark, that a youth can ask useful questions. But as to your additional remark, I am compelled to say that most of those which I have asked have been regarded as questions that ought never to have been asked, or that were not worth answering at all, and certainly none of them have been answered."

"But that need not prevent you from

asking them. Or if you think it need, how does such an opinion tally with your advice to me never to think of the public at all?"

"But that refers not to asking questions, but to the manner of representing facts, real or imaginary. What is the use of asking questions to which you know beforehand you will get no answer? When I have found out the answers for myself, I will re-state the questions with the appropriate solutions, and certainly without ever asking myself the question whether the solutions will be palatable to the public or not. But till then I shall remain silent. My time, meanwhile, will be more profitably employed in seeking for answers to questions already put, than in putting fresh ones."

"You will probably grow old in the investigation, Sir Everard."

"Exactly. And then I may presume to teach, without any dread of the just reproach, No youth can be a master."

"I think you might be one to me."

"In what?"

"In a thousand things. You have already taught me a great deal."

"Then you must have very cunning powers of acquisition. Have you seen Mr. or Mrs. Narracott lately?"

"I saw him the other day. I have not seen her for some time. I do not think she likes me." Delafosse remembered Countess's stupid remark, "I am sure I shall hate that woman!" "Tell me, Sir Everard," the girl went on, "Is Mrs. Narracott a very jealous woman?"

"No."

It was instinctive and immediate sense of loyalty to his friend that made him answer with such a rapid and decided negative; but the moment that he had uttered it, he felt that he had said what was anything but true. Mrs. Narracott was, as he had more than once witnessed, unwisely jealous of her husband in trivial matters, and, as he had more than once experienced, funnily jealous

of himself, as friend, in matters where one would have imagined there was no room for jealousy at all.

"Indeed!" the other went on. "You surprise me. I should have thought that she was *rather* jealous at any rate, but I suppose I am mistaken. However, I am quite sure she does not like me."

"That is quite possible. Mrs. Narracott is a very thorough and a very true woman, and those whom she likes she likes very much. Hence she is not particularly pleased to see anybody whom she prefers, preferring somebody else. If that be jealousy, then I dare say she is jealous."

"No, I do not call that jealousy, and I have no doubt you are right, for you ought to know well. Is *he* jealous—I do not mean of his wife, but in other matters?"

"There I must say I think he is. Montagu, who is just as little jealous of me, as far as his wife is concerned, as he has any

reason to be, is jealous of me in my relations with other people. But their jealousy of me is a joint affair which arises out of their true and most valuable friendship and regard for me, so that I cannot complain of or condemn it."

"What a fortunate man you are, Sir Everard!"

"Why, particularly?"

"To have two such charming people fond of you even to jealousy."

"Then you admire Mrs. Narracott?"

"Yes, and like her too, and am only sorry that she does not like me. And I think that even he is not pleased at my setting such value, not only on your book, but on your counsel."

"I am sure," he replied, "Montagu would never be displeased at any, however exaggerated, estimate you put upon my book, unless the estimate were unfavourable. And if possibly he could be affected by any advice

I gave you, it could only be because he did not quite like me to care to give, or perhaps you to care to receive it."

"About my caring to receive it, I am sure he is quite indifferent; therefore he is probably displeased at your caring to give it, especially when it is so different from what he himself always gives me."

"But, is he displeased at all?"

"Well, perhaps he is not, and I was very stupid to ask any question about it."

"And you are not lonely here, Miss Raffles?"

"Lonely! Who could be lonely? The sun shines, and the birds sing, and the roses bloom, and the woods wave, and the cushats coo, and O, I thank you so much for being the cause of my coming here."

"But, have I any claim to such an honour?"

"I mean, of my leaving town and burying myself in sylvan shades. Even if my work still continue to be poor and superficial, I

shall at least have been happier whilst doing it."

"In that case, I shall be very glad to be partly responsible for your change of scene. Now I must go: I have a man staying with me who works all day, but nevertheless expects his dinner and me, his host, at seven."

"What does he work at?"

"I cannot tell you what he works *at*, but he works with his pen."

"Another literary man? What is his name?"

"Ambrose Champion."

"Do you know *him?*" she said, in a tone that sounded of surprise.

"Yes: do you?"

"No. Do you see my scissors?" She had stooped down and was rummaging for them in the long grass. "I had them just now; I was cutting off the dead roses with them when you came. How stupid of me! Here they are—thanks. . . . . No, I don't know him, but I have heard of him."

"What? for it is more than *I* have. I know him, but I confess I never heard of him, and I never met anybody who had."

"Really, I don't know. I seem to have heard his name somewhere, but that is all."

"Good-bye, then. If you want anything—and it seems to me you must want many things which The Hold can supply—you will really do me a favour by asking for them."

"How kind of you, Sir Everard. There is only one thing that I can think of at present that I should like from The Hold, and that is—may I say it?"

"Certainly; I shall be delighted to let you have it."

"An occasional visit from—its master."

"That you would have had without asking for it. Whenever I am a resident landlord, I believe I am a pretty good one, and visit my tenants regularly."

"And I am one."

"Old Hannah is, at any rate; and I could

not think of coming to see her without looking in to know how rich and deep you are getting."

"Rich and profound; not rich and deep. I think that is the fairer, and certainly the pleasanter antithesis to poor and superficial. And how often do you honour your tenants?"

"Some oftener than others. Hannah comes in for unusual honours, for two reasons. She is old and infirm, and this is a favourite ride of mine."

"How delicious!" She said it as if with an impulse that she could not resist. Then the head and curls went back, and the grey eyes looked very earnest, and the hungry mouth let out the rich deep tones: "*Do* come often. I want you to help me in my work, if you will. I know it is so poor, so faulty, so sketchy, and your judgment is so good, and you are so frank and yet so kind. Won't you, Sir Everard?"

"Yes, I will come and see you; but at first you will work best without too many

interruptions or too much criticism. Good-bye."

"Good-bye. Many thanks. Are you riding?"

"Yes."

She came round, and saw him mount.

"I passed here last night on horseback about eleven o'clock, and saw a light in that room. Is it one of yours?" He pointed to it with his whip, as he put his foot in the stirrup. She looked up.

"That is my bedroom."

"Then I saw you in it, or your shadow, at least, on the blind. It was that which brought me here to-day, for I knew Hannah always goes to rest betimes, and therefore I felt sure she must have somebody in the house."

"Who did you suppose it was?"

"Some relative of the poor old soul; as soon, I mean to say, as I discovered that nothing was wrong."

"And how did you discover that? I wonder you did not come in to see."

"I discovered it by getting close under the window and listening; and though I became satisfied that all was right, I was more puzzled than ever."

"Why?"

"Because after seeing the movement of the shadow, which I was sure was thrown by a figure, young and—with your permission—anything but rustic, I heard, to my surprise, a voice behind the blind humming an air from the last new opera—what do you call it?"

"How romantic! I wish I had known. And you were under that window on horseback last night! Why did you not take up the air, and serenade me back?"

"Authors are not so privileged as authoresses."

"You are severe, Sir Everard." She did not, however, seem much to mind the

severity. "In future I shall go to bed without my even-song."

"Or a candle," he added, and laughed. Then he bent down and offered his hand, re-steadied himself in the saddle, and with an "I am late," dashed into a gallop.

She watched him ride off, leaning over the low oak paling, with her head thrown well back, till his figure was merged in the distant trees. Then she turned away.

"And he knows Ambrose, and Ambrose is staying there. How very strange, and it may be, very awkward. However, we shall see."

CHAPTER VII.

A MODERN FAVOURITE.

"WHAT extraordinary beings some women are!" said Sir Everard, as he unfolded his napkin, and, sitting opposite his one guest, opened the important ceremony of dinner, which, though it has to be gone through day after day, we always approach with the freshness which we can feel but for very few novelties.

"All of them, for that matter," said the other; "but what is it that provokes the repetition of a remark not quite so original as some things I have heard you say."

"Such a singular thing! When I was riding home last night from Rymington, I passed by old Hannah's cottage, which I have pointed out to you—you remember?"

"Yes, the one I said I should like to have entirely to myself."

"Exactly. To my great surprise, there was a light in one of the upper windows, and I know Hannah goes to bed before nine and also sleeps below. I pulled up a moment, listened, and heard a female voice singing an operatic air, and a new one."

"Romantic, very. What did you do?"

"I rode away."

"'Shame, O shame unto thee, if ever,' &c. . . . You ought to have taken up the strain, or sung to her another."

"Just what she said herself, this afternoon."

"You have been to see her then? I thought it was scarcely like you to ride

away without some intention of going back. Who is the fair cantatrice?"

"Now, for the wonder of it. Did you ever read a book called 'Head over Heels?'"

"What has that got to do with it?" asked Champion, curiously.

"Wait a bit, and I will tell you. *Did* you?"

"A novel, is it?"

"Yes."

"You know I never read novels," he answered, curtly.

"I know you do, my good fellow."

"Very seldom. At any rate, I never read that one."

"Did you ever hear of it?"

"I have seen its name in the libraries' lists of usual rubbish. A sensation story, wasn't it? But I really cannot be interested in anything of the kind. How did you enjoy your ride?"

"My talk, you mean. . . . You are a great literary swell, and I am but one of the

crass public." The banter had been provoked, and had fairly begun. "So whilst you were writing for an enlightened posterity, I was reading 'Head over Heels,' which was clever enough, and tolerably amusing."

"Strange, for you. It is all very well for you to chaff me; but I know that, though I read very few novels, you read still fewer."

"True enough. But then you see the young lady who wrote that successful story, sent it me. Men are open to flattery, and I read it."

"She will be dedicating to you her next, and then I hope you'll be flattered."

"No, I intend to refuse all such honours till *you* are ready, and can dedicate to me your 'Magnum Opus.'"

The other tried to laugh.

"You will have to wait a long time."

"I fancy I shall. . . . However, to return. I met the young lady some short time ago in town, at Montagu Narracott's."

"Just the sort of place to meet her at, I should think. It's a sort of centre of literary grocery, is it not?"

"Literary grocery" was a cant phrase of Champion's, which included all that written work which is done to meet the want of the moment; and no motives of delicacy or politeness ever prevented him from striking out upon the subject, so deep-seated was his mania, whenever it was introduced. Delafosse was quite accustomed to it. And furthermore, as he had his own more moderate views upon the question, and thought he knew to what to attribute Champion's immoderate ones, he never took any notice of such remarks, even when they affected his friend Narracott, except to find in them fresh scope for pleasantry. This time he took no notice at all, as he wanted to go on with his story.

"She made herself agreeable to me, and led me into talking a good deal about herself and her books. I frankly gave her my

opinion, not a very complimentary one, and told her—really without imagining for a moment that she would ever make any use of the advice—that if she wanted to do anything better, she should bury herself in the country, instead of displaying herself in the town."

"And she has come to old Hannah's cottage!"

"Exactly."

"The devil she has!"

"Have *you* any objection?"

"How can it matter to me? I was merely corroborating your opening maxim that some women are very extraordinary beings."

"And she is certainly one of them. I happened to mention, in sheer joke, that I had on my estate the very place for her, and if she does not find it out, and ensconce herself in it within a couple of months after! and though it is ever so far from London,

and from every thing else than can concern her."

"Except *you*. She's near enough for that."

"Bah! Come, I know you like making acquaintances; I'll take you to see her, the next time I call."

"Not I, indeed. I have no wish to see her."

"She is young, and some people would think very good-looking. Striking she certainly is, and as deft and cunning with her tongue as any girl you ever saw. You generally fire up at mention of such good things. But I confess you do not seem interested in *her*."

"Interested! Who would be interested in a parcel of scribbling people, who glut the market with their ungrammatical three-volume spasms to the exclusion of sound literature?"

"And pray, how do you know it's ungrammatical, if you have not read it?"

"From one, know all. They're every one alike."

"No, my good fellow, they are not. 'Head over Heels,' did, every now and then, betray a disregard for the rules of syntax, but I am told that Miss Rosie Raffles has corrected these little blemishes in her later works."

"O, d——n 'Head over Heels,' and Rosie Raffles, too!"

Delafosse burst out laughing.

"What have those poor little curls—very bewitching ones, I can tell you—what have they done to call down the thunder of the gods?"

"No, but you pick up a parcel of—of—of grocers, and because they have pretty wives, or little curls, or some such nonsense, you patronise their pretensions instead of pooh-poohing them. You'll end by writing like them, if you don't mind."

"I almost fear I shall, unless you make

haste with this model work of yours, on which I am to build my style."

"The model work, as you call it, will never find a publisher, as long as these cheap Jacks infest the market."

Delafosse laughed again, rose from table, and lighted a cigar.

"Then why don't you publish it yourself?"

"It's all very well for you to say that, but how can I do it? I cannot afford it. Now, if I could only marry a woman with a lot of money, as you are going to do——"

It always came round to that.

"Then go and do it:" the other answered good humouredly, and sauntered across the grass, leaving Champion with the wine.

Sir Everard, sitting on a low wicker garden-chair, and smoking his cigar, naturally enough, after some as yet perfectly useless speculations as to what would be the result of the incident that had taken place

the preceding evening at The Slopes, fell to thinking about this other and very different young person who, only truth to tell, had gone completely out of his mind after his talk with her on Narracott's balcony. He had not called upon her in London, as she had asked him to do. He had not had enough time to do it with ease, and had not had enough inclination to induce him to try to make time. She had interested him at the moment; but only as a study, and there was no likelihood of his prosecuting it, except under very favourable circumstances. Here they were, however. He would have been the stupidest of men if he had not perceived, and the most disingenuous of men, if he had not, to himself at least, allowed, that its being in his neighbourhood must have had much, if not everything, to do with the choice of her present abode.

"In which case," he said aloud, as he knocked a long ash from his cigar, "she is a very great fool for her pains."

Why she should go considerably out of her way to be near him, he did not care to speculate too closely. Some women are very persistent, and none lack a fair amount of perseverance; but if Rosie Raffles wanted to marry him, she began by showing her hand rather frankly, and did not therefore improve her chance, in itself ludicrously slight, by a step ludicrously imprudent. He spent but a moment or so in permitting these reflections audience, and tried rather to recal what Narracott had told him about her.

He had an indifferent memory for such things. But even had he been able to summon back whatever information his friend had given him, it would have amounted to precious little, since neither Montagu nor anybody else knew anything about this young authoress which could safely be relied on. She had all at once published a novel about gentlemen and ladies, provincial actresses, money-lenders, and horses, which

had proved very successful, both with the critics and the public. The interior of the booths of country fairs was usually supposed to be pretty accurately represented, and the talk and tricks of the tribes of Israel wore an air at least of considerable verisimilitude. But the modern Ulysses, unless, indeed, he had really carried out his purpose to sail beyond the sunset, would have been unable to name the town in which he had met with the men and manners of "Head over Heels;" and I do not mind saying, myself, that no European city or country-seat has as yet introduced me to its women, and no hunting-ground been happy enough to mount me on its surprising steeds. But the incidents of the story were prodigally, and, in a certain sense, dexterously introduced; and though it is true that nothing which any character had said or done, at all enabled you to expect them, they were on that very account all the more surprising, and, so to speak, unexpected. Gentlemen difficult to please

quoted its bad grammar, paraded its improbabilities, and made merry over its amazing "runs;" but while Wilfrid the magnificent, who was foremost in all this pleasantry, could get nobody to look at his lyrics, and had at last to come down and write prose in Monthly Magazines at ten shillings a page, the publishers were fighting pitched battles over Rosie Raffles's next, and she finally signed with the pluckiest of them for nine hundred good English pounds, to be paid within a month after publication. It in turn, though with fewer faults and less ingenuity than its predecessor, had by virtue of established prestige, and some wonders of its own, been if possible more successful still; and another round sum immediately offered on condition of immediate work had driven her straight again to her imagination. In the third there was a perceptible falling off from her own merits; but syntax and ordinary behaviour were a little more considered, and these conjoined with the im-

petus given by her first success, and which was not yet wholly spent, carried this attempt likewise against what depreciatory opinions it encountered. Her publisher had given her for her second and third, rather more than their real market value, in order to prevent her falling into the hands of those who had not the courage to offer more than they thought they could recover. But now that he had secured her services, he told her that he had in neither case been repaid, and should be obliged to offer less for the fourth than for either of the other two. Still he named a liberal sum, which she wisely accepted without demur. Then it was that she had acknowledged to Sir Everard, that her work was poor and superficial, and that she wanted to do something better. What did he think?

So that you see she was no penniless adventurer who had come down express from town to fasten upon a rich lord of the manor. No doubt, she knew as little of the incum-

brances upon The Hold as she knew about 'cross country or courtly society; but if she wanted anything with Sir Everard Delafosse, it could scarcely be his unpretending income and modest menage. He had heard all sorts of ridiculous speculations about her at Narracott's, but had he been able to remember them, they would have amounted to no more than this. Some said she had been a strolling-player and was the daughter, if she was anybody's, of the manager of the Whitford-cum-Curling Theatre Royal, that was burnt down only the other day, that she had written the pieces which had made that home of the dramatic art so extensively patronised by the nobility, gentry, and general public of the county, and also, by the favour of Lieut.-Col. Slappertem and the officers of her Majesty's Isle-of-Man Fusiliers, obtained for it the musical attractions of the famous band of that gallant and distinguished regiment. But what did it all amount to? Why, that in "Head over Heels" there was a good deal

about what she had called the "direct descendant of the Thespian cart" (it was spelt Thespean in the first edition, but corrected in the second at the kind instigation of that high classical authority, the "Flammifer," a weekly journal of politics, literature, science, art, everything in fact), and that some of the natural scenery—thrown in, as one does see it thrown in—bore a strong resemblance (witness the flour-mills and the lime trees) to the scenery in the neighbourhood of Whitford-cum-Curling; and further, that the manager of its Theatre Royal, whose name was certainly not Raffles, but then these acting people never call themselves by their right names, had been had up many years ago before the Whitford-cum-Curling magistrates for neglecting to provide for a little girl whose name was certainly Rosie and who used to come on to the stage and say that she was "the daughter of the sun and air," but who the drunken

old vagabond was ready to take his Bible oath was no daughter of his. Others then, having discredited or tried to discredit this story, had their own. O, didn't you know? She was the daughter of a stud groom in Lord what-was-his-name's stables, that everybody said Lady Claribel had arranged to run away with; but the plan was found out in time, and the thing was hushed up somehow, and nobody ever knew anything about it, except that he married a very pretty housemaid of my lord's, and set up as a money-lender, to the Civil Service mostly, though where the deuce the money came from nobody could tell, if it did not come from my lord himself, which was the likeliest thing in the world, as Lady Claribel had lain lost for ever so long and then married a Transylvanian count, and was never seen where anybody ought to be seen, and whether the authoress of "Head over Heels" was the daughter of the housemaid or the countess

—well, well, it was a funny world, but that was her history and the simple truth of the matter.

Now this story, though perhaps rather the more interesting and romantic story of the two, had just about as much foundation for it as the other, and of precisely similar a character. I believe that in her second romance, the beautiful and accomplished daughter of a haughty millionnaire ran away and actually married her father's handsome coachman, who came in for what property, a considerable amount, the young lady possessed in her own right; that he very soon transferred his affections back to an old love, viz., his wife's lady's-maid, that these two managed to despatch her and deposit her in a subterranean passage, entered into holy wedlock, took a house in Belgravia, and are, I believe, supposed to be living there yet. Given a man or woman about whom nothing is known, and let him or her write a book, and the many-headed beast will at

once put all its heads together, and concoct from the said book a tolerably complete family history. So it was with poor Rosie, and it was even worse. For whilst some stuck to the above fables and would have it that they were the whole truth and nothing but the truth, those who refused their adhesion, imagined and sometimes hinted, stories still less agreeable. Marston Light, who never believed any lies but those which he himself invented, would hear neither of the manager nor the millionnaire, but had a pedigree for her of his own, which *you* would not hear and I have no wish to repeat. In London she had always lived with an old—lady, shall we say?—whom she called her aunt, and who was as much her aunt, said Light, as you're my grandmother. In the country, as we have seen, a maid was her only retinue.

Despite those curveting curls, that deep mellow voice, and a few other not ineffective points, she was not the girl to satisfy the

rigorous judgment of Sir Everard Delafosse. Tolerant man as he was, and ever contending to the best of his ability against the class prejudices which he necessarily inherited with his name, still he liked people to come from somewhere, or to look and act as if they did. Her manners, though not otherwise open to severe criticism, had about them a calm and settled defiance which was no doubt due to her consciousness that questions were asked behind her back, to which folks could extort no answer from the vigilance and composure of her face. Not only, like most people, a lip worshipper of liberty, but a practical defender of its prerogatives, the young baronet would but have admired her for any assumption of personal freedom, so long as it was assumed for the purposes of strictly defensive warfare. To contend against that public opinion, still strong, though of late materially weakened, which would not permit a woman to go her own way, though with complete security to herself and no

earthly detriment to others, this he would have been one of the first to commend. But he could not approve in that sex whose own interest it is, far more than that of the other, to play the part of the mountain rather than that of Mahomet, any such initiative as was but too manifestly taken, for some purpose or other, by the woman who had come and made herself scarcely a stranger almost within his gates.

Lest some should silently urge that the assumption of excessive freedom by women is the result of their assuming any at all, I would parenthetically plead that it is scarcely wonderful if liberty should lose its own sound mind under long and rigorous confinement, and if its first act, on being released from its chains, should be to bite its emancipator.

Nevertheless, with every wish to make allowance for one whose history he did not know, and with a predisposition to pardon much in her who seemed to find nothing

that required pardon in him, Delafosse was not, after this second time of meeting Rosie Raffles, very favourably impressed. There is scarcely any flattery too gross for a man to swallow at the hands of a pretty woman, and he was certainly not uninfluenced by the fact that a line of conduct which he condemned, had been deliberately taken out of some species of regard for himself. And it is possible that he might have still further extenuated her questionable taste and unquestionable indiscretion, had he not again been biassed against her by her inquiries and remarks concerning his friends, Mr. and Mrs. Narracott; and his leniency might have again suffered diminution had he overheard the following conversation which was going on in the pretty house in London at the very moment, this tranquil summer night, that he was speculating why Montagu and his wife still did not offer to come down to Batterton:

"Where do you think Rosie Raffles has gone to?"

"I really don't care in the least where she may have gone to or how long she may stay there;" answered Countess in a magnificent indifferent way of which she was a consummate mistress; and after arranging her comb at a cheval glass entirely to her satisfaction, she turned to pick off some withered geranium leaves in a stand on the balcony.

"What a superb wife it is!" said Montagu, in a playful tone, approaching and putting his arm round her waist. "She doesn't mean to say that she is still jealous of the sensational young authoress?"

"Still jealous! I never was. I thought it bad taste both of you and Sir Everard to make so much of her, and I think so yet. But you men are all alike. People sometimes say: if animals only knew their power, it would be a bad look-out for us. If women only knew theirs! Some of them do; but it

is generally the weakest and poorest of them who care to use it."

"Miss Rosie is, I suppose, in the latter category?"

"Precisely so."

"She is going to use it, then, against Everard—or rather she has gone."

"I really do not care. But how do you mean when you say she has gone?"

"Gone down to Batterton."

"Nonsense."

"Fact."

"I thought it would come to that, when she told you that he had recommended her to go and work in that cottage. Who was right, Master Montagu? I was quite sure she had befooled him that night, and I am delighted we have not gone down."

"If we had, we might have prevented her from going."

"Not a bit—he had asked her—or as good as asked her—already. And I do not care,"

she added with delicious frankness "to be second, where I have been first."

"That's nonsense. But they won't do each other any good. He has put it into her head that she is a genius, instead of being about as big a little fool as ever walked, and can write something very much better than anything she has yet written. It's all very well for him to insist upon a high standard, who, perhaps, could reach it himself if he tried hard, and who is not compelled to try to reach any standard at all. But for that little goose, who has become famous by a fluke, the more steadily she sticks to common work the better for her."

"I should think so, indeed; her work would then be like herself." And they both laughed. "But what she can want with him, or he with her, unless—— I'm disgusted with him. And then to pretend that he cares for Miss Swetenham!"

"And not jealous of me?" he asked again, teasingly. "We'll go down to the sea-side; though I'm sorry not to go to The Hold."

"I would not go now on any account."

And there it ended.

By all which we may perceive how a dexterous woman can deceive everybody, without at all deviating from the truth, and your best friends believe the most terrible things against you, without being in the right, or yet very much to blame.

Delafosse drew himself up from the low garden-chair, and calling out "Champion! Champion!" went into the house to seek him. He was not there, however. It was a night unusually clear, and the moon was rapidly mounting. By the time it had made sufficient way to peer over the woodland and throw beautiful long shadows on the grassy plot the south side of Hannah's cottage, it had enticed from within the

young lodger, who found in its beams and in all which now lighted up so well under its transforming influence, still further proof of the discretion of her choice. She herself, too, harmonised admirably with the setting. With her slim figure, well-carried head, golden hair, and sailing, silent motion, she had the fay-like look which we perforce associate with moonlit scenes. The night air brought out more strongly, too, the scent of what roses yet lingered at the extremity of the enclosure, and she had bent forward to inhale from one of them its dew-drawn perfume, when she started at the sound of yielding branches and crackling twigs close beside her. There was not time to run from the approach of the figure which followed straight upon the rustling noise, before she had fully recognised its owner, and saw no need for flight.

"Ambrose!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," he answered. "And what the deuce has brought you here?"

"My own convenience," she answered, recovering all her composure,

"It's very inconvenient to *me*"

"It usually is. But what would you have me do? You used to complain that I molested you; it is now you who molest me. I only ask to be let alone, as you used to ask, since you refuse to share in what advantages I now have."

"Share in them! They are the very things I complain of. You make yourself famous—or infamous—with your ridiculous books——"

"I am quite content with them, and the result too."

"Of course you are; and I dare say it's better than writing anonymous sonnets in the corners of provincial newspapers; but your success, coarse and vulgar success as it is, is only one more obstacle in my way. And now you must needs come and hang on to my most valuable friend, and at the very moment I am stopping with him."

"I was not aware till yesterday that you so much as knew him."

"You know it now."

"Yes; but——"

"We had better go into the wood," he said, looking cautiously around him. "He might come."

"This way," she said. "You startled me so, coming through the brake. See, there is a regular pathway."

They walked, side by side, a short distance, till they halted by a tiny dark pool, sunk well into the ground, and which the moonbeams could touch but could not illumine. All else, however, was bathed in copious rich light.

"I know now, as you say: but I do not see how my being here at all interferes with your movements or any plans you may have."

"Well, you know I do not want you near me, if there were no other reason." She drew in one of her little feet, and

slightly turned her head. "But there are other reasons. Of course, he came home to-day and told me all about you."

"What did he say?" she asked, eagerly.

"Nothing. Except that you wrote books and that sort of thing. But he wanted me to come with him to see you"—she drew the foot still further in, and turned more decidedly away—"and of course will often want me to come. And supposing we are walking past here together and happened to meet you——"

"I never go out of the garden, and never will, if you like."

"But supposing we were passing the cottage together, and he wanted me to go in, how could I refuse, I should like to know?"

"You could not, and I do not see why you should, Ambrose. I can act my part, if you can act yours. You have schooled me long enough."

"But I do not want to act any such part.

I want Sir Everard Delafosse to myself, without your intervention."

"What do you want him for?"

"That is more than I need tell you. But I tell you that I do want him, and at this time particularly."

"But supposing that *I* want him too?"

"What can you want with him? I cannot force you to go away, but beyond a certain point I will not permit you to go."

She looked at him straight. In that single glance a shrewd spectator would have seen for certain that she had any amount of moral courage, and he had none, and that she had him in her power far more than he had her, did she choose to exercise it. And in her silence under the threat he would have also read that she was too fond of him, somehow, to do so. Champion read it, too, as he had read it in her face a thousand times, and was quick to turn it to account.

"But I do not want to threaten. It

never used to be necessary. Has success made you selfish, and indifferent to my desires?"

"So little so, that I would too gladly give up my success to secure yours, and I only wish it were not so long in coming. But, Ambrose, why not accept mine? It may be somewhat yours, and might, perhaps, assist——"

"How? I tell you it would injure it."

"I did not mean that. I mean that what my success has brought, would help you to obtain yours. They give me nine hundred pounds for my books."

"You don't say so?" And he began walking about and flinging up his arms as he would when worsted in argument by one of Delafosse's direct charges.

"But they do. And I can write nearly two a year, and I wish you would take half, or"—and she put her head down, not back, as when with Sir Everard. Women's faces are generally lowest when they have least

reason to ashamed—" or all, if you want it. Do, Ambrose! do take it!"

She followed him as he walked about. At last he stood still.

"No, no! I will do it myself, I tell you. Do you think I am going to let you do it for me! A pretty success that would be! Nine hundred pounds for——! Well, stay where you are, however, if you won't go."

"I *will* go, if you wish it, if it is necessary to you, though I hope it is not, and I do not see how it can be."

"Of course you don't, because you don't know anything about it."

"Then I will go," she said, submissively.

"No, you need not. Now that I think of it, you might just as well stay. It may possibly be useful. But look here! If you breathe a word to him about——"

"Do you think I would? The past might shelter me from such a suspicion."

"That's all, then." And he turned to go.

"You will come to see me?"

"No, of course not."

She clutched at him.

"Kiss me, Ambrose!"

He just rubbed his bearded lips coldly against her forehead, and walked hurriedly away. His step was short but rapid, and his elbows moved more than his arms could be said to move. He seemed to be walking very fast, but in reality was not doing so; it is the long steady stride that tells. At last he pulled up, looked round, and then let his wild-looking eyes rest upon the moon. Then came some indistinct rhapsody, probably his own, written long ago, and part of what, at the time of writing it, he had made sure would have rendered him famous long, long ere this. Then he exclaimed: "Just to think of it! That girl—that child—that—that—nine hundred a year! And I'm just where I was when I first—— The devil's in it. What *is* to be done? One thing, and one thing alone." Then more rhapsody, but this time not his own:

"'Ambition cursed by all who lose,
So loved by those who win!'

What an age! Nine hundred pounds for a —a—— Heavens! was there ever such a lovely night!"

And so he went on, now stopping, now talking aloud, now hastening his steps, but still, in them all, manifesting the mind of a man who had no sense of his own proportions, nor yet of those of the universe.

CHAPTER VIII.

IMPORTANT TRIFLES.

SHINGLESEA is now too well known to fame to need description. The Great Coast line has brought it within everybody's reach, and Sir Dionysius Courtly has sent there, at some time or other, full half the fashionable invalids of the kingdom. Sir Dionysius is no fool, though it is probable that he is better acquainted with "Chesterfield's Letters" than with "Squire's Pharmacopœia." Pre-eminently a lady's doctor, and renowned throughout the world for his marvellous success in the treatment of the difficult cases

of babies, he has not scorned to turn to practical account his honourably-acquired scientific reputation; and whilst Shinglesea was yet only what its name implies, he bought up every rood of land along its shore, pronounced its climate, in a gilt-edged pamphlet which every person of consequence had at once upon her table, to be the most healthy in the world, and packed off to its "salubrious strand" every man, woman, and child whom his skill and unremitting care—two visits every day for six weeks—had succeeded in snatching from the jaws of death. He himself, in order the better to supervise the needs of his numerous patients, makes Shinglesea his abode during the autumn months; and it is currently reported that in the new Reform Bill, which Her Majesty's Ministers will shortly propose to the House of Commons, Shinglesea is to be enfranchised, and will return as its first member the learned knight, who can candidly be said entirely to represent its interests.

But all these wonders have occurred, as such wonders do occur in this said and done century, within the brief space of a very few years; so that, at the period when it obtrudes itself upon our notice, Sir Dionysius had only just bought his first quarter of a mile out of his first season's practice, and run up the first few houses of what everybody now admires as Cerulean Parade. The seamew had not yet yielded to the ophicleide, and the big abounding breakers still roughly gambolled on the beach, where maidens now sit and sigh at the heart-rending strains of the Plungers' Waltz. A metropolitan member might, like Demosthenes, have corrected his natural defects of speech by contending against the bluster of its thunderous tide, and some unpromoted parson have wandered, like Homer's Priest of Apollo, silent by the deep-sounding main.

Mrs. Narracott was sitting at open window with an uncut novel on her lap, and Montagu beginning a new chapter of a novel that was

"running" through the "Monthly Mixture," with a description of the sea-side in the best modern photographic manner, so much admired since so easily understood, when little Montie, mother's darling and sire's constant companion in leisure, came running in red and breathless, with,

"O pappy, dear, I say! here's that funny man we met at Sir Everard Delafosse's, and a lot o' ladies."

"Where, my dear?" said Mrs. Narracott, leaping up from her chair, instantly conscious that her back hair was very untidy, and that they had only one sitting-room, the one in which they were, and with a terrible vision of a family of respectable ladies solemnly ascending the staircase at that very moment, and in another sure to be announced. "Where, Montie? Run, child, run—quickly—quickly—and say we are not at home."

"Run where, mamma?"

"To the servant!"

"But they're not hee-e-re!" said the lad.

Montagu, who had just lifted his head and pen from his work at the interruption, and nothing more, burst out laughing.

"He means he has seen them on the beach, don't you Montie?"

"Yes," the boy answered with an air of wonder and injured innocence, as if his meaning had been perfectly clear from the first; "sitting on the shingles and playing some funny game or other."

Children usually regard new people or new things as what they call "funny"—(elder persons use the word "ridiculous")—and little Montie had regarded as particularly funny the gentleman whom he had once seen at The Hold, and who, after a few more questions, turned out to be Philip Pemberton, whom we already know to have come down to Shinglesea some little time since.

"It must be his mother and his cousins who are with him," said Mrs. Narracott. "Sir Everard said that the old lady was

rather nice, though I do not think he was very enthusiastic about the young ones. But they would not call on us, even here, simply because we know Mr. Pemberton, and him but slightly."

"Of course not. Go along, Montie, or sit quiet with your mother, for I want to work."

Mrs. Pemberton did not call; it was to the last degree improbable that she would. But the whole party, mother and son and nieces on one side, and husband and wife and child on the other, met each other face to face a couple of days after; and then there was a series of introductions to "my mother, my cousin Miss Langley, and my cousin Miss Deborah Langley," &c. &c. Mrs. Narracott was not very fond of women, and women not particularly fond of her, and between Montagu and Philip Pemberton there could not be much in common. But people find each other very tolerable at a lonely sea-side place who would content themselves with "moving" in a provincial

town, and who would "look the other way" in Bond-street; and we need not be surprised to hear that the very morning after, whilst Montagu was at work, and Philip piously leading his dear old mother where she best loved to wander, hard by the water's edge, Mrs. Narracott was sitting between Miss Kate and Miss Deborah on the only green bench which Shinglesea as yet could boast.

"Do you often go down to Batterton?" asked Miss Kate.

"No, we have been there only twice. Sir Everard asked us to visit him during this month, but we preferred coming down to Shinglesea."

The young ladies glanced significantly at each other across Mrs. Narracott, Miss Deborah taking up the word.

"But it is very pleasant, staying at The Hold, is it not?"

"Yes," answered Countess in a way that, though it might not mean "no," at most meant "pretty well," or "yes, *but*——"

"I do not think he particularly wanted us, just now."

"But he asked you, I thought you said," remarked Miss Kate, "and I always thought that he was such a sincere man, and said exactly what he thought without minding anybody."

"So he does," answered Mrs. Narracott; "and perhaps I am wrong in saying that he did not want us. However, I am very glad that we did—that we have come to Shingle-sea instead, I mean."

Again the maidens exchanged a rapid and intelligent glance. Miss Kate, as the elder, and therefore probably the more dexterous, made the next move; and its appropriateness showed how very quick women are in seizing each others' meaning, when a man would take longer at arriving at it than in analysing a cuneiform inscription.

"Has he anybody stopping with him?"

"Not that I know of, except a Mr.

Champion, a very decent and rather amusing and original sort of man. No, nobody *stopping* with him."

"Do you not like the people in his immediate neighbourhood?" asked Miss Deborah. But the rashness of youth had led her to charge in quite the wrong direction. They were off the track now, though her sister had once got upon the right one, and Mrs. Narracott had given them an excellent hint for keeping on it. She could now, however, only answer the clumsy question put to her.

"I really do not know them. Not the residents," she answered, thereby giving them another chance.

Whereupon more cautious Kate returned to the attack, and after the usual number of "well, yeses," and "O dear noes!" and "perhapses" it all came out. Men were so singular, and Sir Everard was not the least singular of them, and some women did things that some other women would sooner

die than do, but the long and the short of it was that she did not like to go down, with a person living in a cottage on the very estate, and at Sir Everard's own suggestion; a suggestion, too, made at her house, where she was bound to say he had first met her, but that only made the matter worse. Of course, she did not like to go. Now, would they?

"Go there!" exclaimed Deborah, who had no longer any reason for restraint, and was only too delighted to have a vent for her sense of moral indignation. "Go there, indeed! I would not go within five miles of the place. I consider it is an insult to ask you. I never heard of such an extraordinary thing in my life."

"But what is she? Where does she come from?" asked the other sister, keener upon knowing more, than on wasting breath in empty condemnation of what she knew already.

"She is a young woman who writes

what are supposed to be clever novels; wrote 'Head over Heels.' Did you never read it?"

"No, I do not even know the name."

"O yes, Kate, you do. Don't you remember, it was sent by the librarian along with some other books to The Slopes, and Mrs. Swetenham read the first volume and sent it all back, and said it was not fit to be read by anybody."

"Of course, I do; now I remember perfectly. And she is the authoress of *that*, is she? But what can you expect when women so far forget themselves and what is due to their sex, as to write novels?"

"What, indeed!" echoed Deborah. "But how did *you* come to know her, Mrs. Narracott?"

"Well, you see, my husband is necessarily brought across such people, and must be civil to them; and I must be civil too, for his sake."

"Of course," said Kate. Deborah said

nothing, but thought to herself that she would not be civil to such people for all the husbands in Christendom. But then she had never been led into temptation.

The big bluff waves still thundered away outside; but in number 7B, Lower Cliff, all was quiet enough, where, under the presidency of placid Mrs. Pemberton, her younger ones, who carried with them to the sea-side their rural habits, were just sitting down to a cold, but fragrant and substantial, supper. It was the first time they had all been gathered together since the above-recorded conversation had been held on the green bench. Its first minutes were devoted, it must be owned, to a yawning leg of lamb and crisp salad; but by the time that everybody had been asked if she would take some red-currant pie and everybody thought she would, the young ladies began to look at each other across the table, and to make eyes as much as to say, "You begin," and "No, I'd rather you did," and so

on, till at last Kate took upon herself the (of course disagreeable) duty of repeating what she called the extraordinary thing she and Deborah had heard to-day from Mrs. Narracott.

Philip Pemberton was all attention, though he said little or nothing by way of comment. But he must have been a stern moralist indeed, if, under the circumstances, he had heard the story with any very deep grief. His dear mother, for her part, was all for tempering the warm severity of Deborah and the calmer but more awfully judicial sentence of Kate.

"Judge not, my dears, lest you should yourselves be judged. We do not know if we are acquainted with all the circumstances; very likely we are not. The fact that Sir Everard has asked Mr. and Mrs. Narracott to go and stay with him tells rather in his favour than otherwise."

"But aunt——"

"I am not defending him, my dear, sup-

posing the facts you state be quite true. But even if they are, we shall be more wise in thinking of how they may help to guide our own conduct than in condemning either him or her. Be grateful, my dears, that you have not to write for your bread! And I am sure that Philip will only thank Heaven that he has both of you at home, to preserve him from any other less beneficial female influence."

Then the old lady devoutly said grace for their excellent supper, and they all went to the window to listen to the waves. But Philip thought of another influence besides that of his cousins, which he could to-night think of more hopefully than he had thought thereof for some time; and Miss Deborah said to herself with a sense of retributive justice:

"Just won't I let her know about this fine fellow that she thinks so much of, the very first time she gives me an opportunity!"

Meanwhile the innocent object of all this talk and solicitude was giving but very little thought, and still less time to the person who, they had brought themselves to believe, was monopolising both. Who it was that would have monopolised his thoughts, had he been one to permit himself to be completely occupied by any mere personal feeling, we know well enough. But as he was not of that weak self-indulgent sort, yet could not entirely control a natural impatience for Pemberton's return from Shinglesea, the consequence was that he was more studious than usual, and employed himself again in writing rather than in his wonted pursuits of reading and thinking, as the more certain way of concentrating his slightly distracted attention. Let it not be supposed that he was writing with any object but that of putting down more definitely, and strictly for his own use, what had of late been mostly employing his intellect. Whatever he had said to Ambrose Champion

or to Miss Raffles upon the subject of publication, was no transitory whim, but the settled purpose of his mind. He not only said, but felt, that "no youth can be a master." Had he wrought out any new conclusions which he could persuade himself it would benefit other people to have a chance of accepting, I doubt not but he would have given them to the world, and despite his now perhaps excessive distaste for notoriety, would have given them with his name attached, out of deference to the high value which he set upon the principle of personal responsibility. But he had not arrived at any such, or at least could not enforce them with such demonstration as should authoritatively demand adherence from others. And though he could not help knowing from previous experience that he had a knack of asking questions in a forcible way of his own that could not fail to attract attention, he easily abstained from doing so, since he told Champion no more than the

truth when he said that personal ambition was quite dead within him. And though most people will be ready with the objection which Champion used upon that occasion, that "if you do away with personal ambition, you do away with the motive power of human action, and that Pope was entirely right when he wrote. 'Reason the card, but Passion is the gale,'" I trust there are a few others who will feel the justice of Sir Everard's retort: "That was before the invention of steam. Neither Pope nor Bolingbroke would make the same blunder now. With our advanced moral as with our advanced material motive power, we are no longer in danger of being becalmed. Passion is an excellent auxiliary sometimes; but no reasonable man can wish to be at its mercy, even for his impetus." He, however, saw no reason to modify this opinion, and it therefore remained the director of his conduct. Champion remarked that the pen had been resumed, and with that obstinate

hoping against hope which invariably characterises the attitude of those who lag behind towards those who are advancing, at first imagined it to be an augury that Delafosse was going, as the other phrased it, "to hit out again."

"I see you are writing, and am glad of it. I trust we are going to have some more thunder at last, to scare all those foul birds of low flight and prey."

"You are going to have no thunder from me, my good fellow, you may be quite sure. If you want it, you must manufacture it for yourself. I am writing simply for my own, as yet, private purposes."

"I'm sorry to hear it. I really hoped that you would charge and clear the ground of all the marauders that infest and occupy what ought to be held by honest people. You are the very man to do it."

"Am I? And who are these marauders, pray?"

"You know well enough: literary ma-

rauders. I have named them a thousand times."

"And if you have, I have told you as many, that I do not regard them in the light of marauders."

"What are they then?"

"Sometimes very clever, and always very useful people."

"I do not see the cleverness, and much less the use."

"The cleverness must always be an arguable question; but about the use there can be no argument at all. The moment that you clearly perceive the value and working of the principle of liberty, you will no longer have any doubt upon the question. Give the public every possible species of literature, and it will choose the different species in such proportions as it requires."

"But it will choose the worse species in very preponderant proportions."

"Of course it will: I know that well enough. But because a man's stomach can-

not digest solid flesh, are you going to refuse him broth? Give him time, and by-and-by he will be able to eat a little meat. I do not read 'The Halfpenny Hubbub,' and probably nobody, not even he who writes it, would think that it would do me any good to do so; but there are thousands of people who read it, and who would be still more ignorant than they are if they did not. I do not read 'Robinson Crusoe,' nor practise pothooks, but I once did both; and I am probably largely indebted to the former for my present capacity of enjoying, say Max Müller's 'Science of Language,' and to the latter for my being able to write legibly a hundred and fifty words a minute."

Whereupon the other went off into a diatribe about "grocers" and impostors, and penny-a-lining, and such like; at the end of which Delafosse asked him why, since he had such a quantity of "thunder" ready himself, he must needs look to others for a supply, and why he did not hurl the above

at the real offenders' instead of at his, Sir Everard's, head, who for his part wanted to go on with an analysis he was making of a new report from the Registrar-General.

Champion seemed, for a wonder, to have taken to idling, just as his host had taken to writing, and now spent nearly all his time in the saddle. Delafosse was only too delighted to see him away from his manuscripts and his authorities, considering that he worked overmuch. As usual, they always met at dinner, but saw little of each other except at its hour and the few hours that succeeded it. The fortnight during which Pemberton was to be away at Shinglesea, was nearly over, and Sir Everard had not again been to see his fair under-tenant. He would go this afternoon, he said; would Champion come with him? Champion did not care to go, so he started alone. He was on foot, and walked briskly through copse and aftermath and yellowing field, till he reached the darker woodland which swept wide around the

cottage. There the soft soil and the pensive atmosphere of the forest made him relax his pace; but he soon reached the retired little nook where he found the active young authoress hard at work. She leaped up as he entered.

"So you have come at last, Sir Everard! I thought you had given up your good habits of visiting your tenants, altogether; or that you had run away to London or—or—I don't know where. I am so glad to see you."

"Thanks! you——"

"You are tired, you are warm, you have been walking. *Do* have something to refresh you! I will give you something that I brought from town." And without more ado, she bustled about, and rang for cold fresh water, and mixed it with a bright amber-coloured liquid, and made him own that it was most excellent, and if he had known of it, he almost thought he should have been to see her before.

"Then I will send express to London for more," she said—"that is, if it will make you come again. I have been consoling myself for my solitude by working so, so hard."

"So you do feel it solitary?"

"Just a little, now and then. Do you know, I thought yesterday that you were coming to see me."

"Why?"

"I was hard at work when, about seven in the evening, I heard the sound of horses' hoofs."

"My dinner-hour, seven."

"It was not you, I know. But thinking and hoping that it was, I rushed up-stairs to my bedroom which commands, as you know, the approach, and peeped out. The sound of the hoofs had died; but on looking, I saw two people—a gentleman and a lady—who had now reined in their horses, coming on at a foot's pace towards the cottage. I started back again, in order not to be seen,

and did so too quickly to have made out whether or not it was you, and what the lady was like. But when they got to the cottage, one of them at least halted—I think it must have been the lady—for I heard her say, 'Do let us go in and inquire how Hannah is;' and then he answered, 'No, I will not do anything of the kind. Come on, Deborah, do!' And off they rode, and left poor me lamenting."

"I know who they were," he answered, laughing: "some friends of friends of mine, and indeed acquaintances of my own, that live some few miles off: a Mr. Pemberton and his cousin, Miss Deborah Langley. It is very fortunate that you overheard what you did."

"Why?"

"Simply because I want to see him, and he has been away at the sea-side, and now, you see, I know that he has got back home."

"The mouse may be of some help to the

lion, sometimes, then?" she said archly. "I am so glad to be of service to you in any matter, however trifling."

Had she known that the matter was not at all trifling, still more, had she known what the matter really was, I wonder if she would have been "so" glad to have served him.

"And you have been working very hard?"

"Immensely hard, to-day especially."

"And why especially to-day."

"O, because I have been, and am still in such a rage. Look here, Sir Everard!" And she went to the table and snatched up a copy of "The Afternoon Siesta." "My publisher—kind creature! sent me this to-day. Just look at *that!*"

She pointed to an article headed in large type, "Lacquey Literature," and commenceing as follows: "Miss Rosie Raffles seems to imagine that by calling half her men

lords, and all her women countesses, she can turn snobs into gentlemen, and females who combine the manners of servant-maids with the morals of something worse, into ladies; and that a lavish use of a fictitious peerage will make up for her own want of experience of the interior of good society."

"There, that will do," said Sir Everard, laughing, and tossing the paper back on to the table; "I know all that sort of thing of old, and I am not amused by it."

"Neither am I," she answered; "but I am annoyed beyond measure with it."

Again he laughed.

"It annoys you, does it? I'm very sorry for you; but I cannot compassionate you, as I see no good reason for your annoyance. Either the article is unjust with an unjust motive, or unjust with just motive, or just with a just motive. On the first supposition, its injustice will be transparent to everybody; with regard to the second, everybody

must be allowed to decide for himself; if the third supposition be true, it can benefit nobody so much as yourself."

"It is the first, and everybody will see that it is the first. But it is offensive, also."

"Intentional injustice usually is. Calm yourself, my dear Miss Raffles. Upon my word I think you ought to be complimented. When folks abuse you in a criticism, it raises the suspicion that there is not much in the book to abuse. When people took to saying that the first letter of Pope's christian name, together with the first and last of his second, spelled Ape, it was a pretty good proof that he had become a perfect master of the English heroic couplet. And to compare small things with great, I remember when my little book reached a second edition, a journal devoted to literature, art and science, spoke of its author as an 'embarrassed baronet,' and by the time it reached a third edition, I had become in

another critical quarter 'the meanest of my species.' At any rate, I was neither mean nor embarrassed enough to be anything but highly amused at these brave words. I only thought it a pity that they did not point out some of my infelicitous phrases instead, which would have been no difficult matter to an intelligent and well-meaning critic."

"And you would have me, I suppose, repeat Pope's lines and be comforted:

> Let Dennis charge whole Grub-street on my quill,
> I wished the man a dinner and sat still."

"O no, I would not. I have very little doubt that the man who wrote that article on what he calls 'Lacquey Literature,' had dined very tolerably at his club, and that the goodness of his dinner had something to do with his making merry at your expense. The evil is that a bad tone of literary journalism prevails in many, indeed in most quarters, arising, I conceive, from the lack of any code of honour on the subject, and this in turn from the absence of personal

responsibility. On speculative questions, or indeed on things, a man may fairly write anonymously; but I feel satisfied that posterity will marvel that we could ever have considered it decent that one man should criticise another without the names of both being given."

"But in this case I feel sure I know who wrote it."

"Indeed."

"Yes, don't you?"

"Certainly not."

"Don't you know who is editor, or sub-editor, of 'The Afternoon Siesta?'"

"Yes, yes, Montagu—Mr. Narracott is, surely. And you think *he* wrote it?"

"That I do."

"Nonsense, nonsense."

"He must have known of it, at any rate."

"Not necessarily. To the best of my belief he is at this moment down at the sea-side somewhere, though where, I don't know, for I have not heard from him."

"But you are not sure. And I am sure that he is vexed with me for coming down here, and so is his wife, and——"

What could Sir Everard do but interrupt her by another burst of laughter.

"What does it matter *who* wrote it? But of this you may be quite certain, that Montagu knew nothing about it. If I thought so, I would give him a lecture for it—not for abusing your book, since everybody ought to be free to do *that*, if he sees fit, but for abusing you, and in a tone altogether indefensible."

"Will you ask him?"

"If I think of it, I will."

Of course he never gave it another thought, however much Miss Raffles might give to it, and however little it increased her love for Mr. and Mrs. Narracott, since people easily accept reasons for disliking still more those whom they dislike already. What Sir Everard did do, was to go home and write straight off to Philip Pemberton,

and ask what day he might ride over, with a certainty of finding the other at home. What sort of discussion this produced, we may easily guess. But the dear placid old lady prevailed, and Delafosse got a note by return of post, saying that Mr. Pemberton would be very glad if Sir Everard would ride over and lunch with them—it would be their dinner—either the following day or the day after. This was rather more than he had bargained for, though he had a genuine admiration for Philip's mother.

"Pemberton has got back," he said to Champion, "and I am going to lunch there to-morrow; after which I shall put the case about Miss Swetenham, just as you advised, and so hurry him into proposing at once."

"It is high time you did, I think."

"Well, it will be done to-morrow."

And there the subject dropped.

CHAPTER IX.

A WAITING GAME.

THE most honourable women will, without scruple, do things which would be accounted mean even by men not singularly sensitive. But then, on the other hand, it should be remembered that men of considerable tenderness will practise severities which the least sentimental women will condemn as cruel. It is easy to abstain from and reprobate the commission of faults by which we are never benefited, and occasionally suffer.

Miss Deborah Langley was religious, and

her religion, being in unison with her wants, had considerable influence upon her conduct. But you would have very much astonished her if you had expressed the slightest doubt as to the propriety of her following up the information which she had received at Shinglesea, by an inroad upon Sir Everard's estates. She did not often ride on horseback, for her back was not of the strongest; but it was amazing how strong it had seemed to be on the day when, immediately after their return from the sea-side, she had asked Philip to go out with her, and had led him a longer round even than he was himself accustomed to take. She had never thoroughly seen that part of the country, she said at first. Then she would like to see more of it, it looked so beautiful. What splendid woods! By the way, did Philip know where old Hannah's cottage was, of which Mrs. Narracott had spoken? He knew quite well, and they were not far from it; indeed they would pass it in making

their way home, which really they must do now, it was getting so late. Then, and not before—for men are so stupid, and Philip was more stupid even than the average man—did the cloven hoof begin to show. She should so much like to go in and see Hannah. Her cousin then perceived what was her object, and a manly blush came up to his face, and something about prying into other people's affairs rose to his lips; but he repressed it, and only said what Rosie Raffles had heard—viz. that he would do nothing of the sort, and begged Deborah to come along.

"Was it not stupid of him?" the young lady said to her sister Kate, when she got up-stairs, and was so thoroughly knocked up with the ride that she had scarce strength to take off her habit. "It was all on his account that I wanted to do it. If I could only have seen her, only just caught a glimpse of her, it would have been enough. I could then have asked Sir Everard who it was that was lodging with old Hannah. As

it is, I have had my wearisome ride for nothing, and I am nearly dead with soreness and fatigue."

What infinite pains women do take to serve us, and how infamously we requite them.

When the note came from Sir Everard, and it was decided that in reply he should be asked to luncheon, Deborah's mortification at the lost opportunity waxed still deeper, and even the more sober Kate sympathised with her chagrin. As it was, neither saw how the subject could possibly be introduced. On the whole, however, it was as well for them that they did not see their way to it; inasmuch as, about half an hour before the time at which the visitor was expected to arrive, Mrs. Pemberton said placidly, but plainly:

"Now, my dears, it is my particular wish that you treat Sir Everard with every attention, and on no account must you make any allusion, however remote, to the young per-

son who is supposed to be lodging on the Batterton Estate."

"Supposed, aunt! She *is* there."

"Well, my dear, supposed or actually there, no matter. I am sure you will do as I desire."

"Of course, if you wish it, aunt."

"Which I certainly do."

So there was nothing left to them but to speculate as to what he could possibly want with Philip. Punctual to the hour named, he arrived and entered with the air of a man who was not oppressed by any terrible sense of guilt. Indeed, it was difficult to believe that this tall, good-looking, gentlemanly fellow, with his beautiful chivalrously deferential manner to the old lady, his frank cordial open-handed bearing towards Philip, and his bright playful gentle demeanour to the two cousins, was a monster of extraordinary iniquity. True, though he slightly bowed his head when Mrs. Pemberton said grace before meat, it was quite evident that

the attitude was to be attributed to good breeding rather than to participation in the verbal worship. But still he ate like any ordinary Christian, and certainly said that everything was very good.

"And what is Shinglesea like, Miss Deborah? No shingles, and very little sea?"

"Quite the opposite. Such a rough sea, and shingles everywhere. We enjoyed it immensely. We are all going down again very shortly, and the Swetenhams are coming with us."

How did he like *that?* she thought. I fear it was not so terrible a blow as it was intended to be, for he immediately answered in the calmest manner:

"So I heard, when I was at The Slopes about a fortnight ago. Miss Swetenham showed me a picture of the place, and her papa said you were all going there together, if you brought back a favourable report."

"Which we have done," said Kate. "But have you heard nothing from Shinglesea

yourself, Sir Everard? We saw some friends of yours there."

"Friends of mine! Really. Who?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Narracott," said Philip.

"So Montagu and his wife are down there, are they? I had not a notion where they were, though I strongly suspected they were at the sea-side somewhere. I wanted them so much to come and stay with me, and they almost promised to do so. But they have not come, and I have not heard from them for a month at least."

Here was an opportunity, and Deborah looked at Kate, and Kate at Deborah. But the dear old lady looked at both of them, and their tongues were tied. They could only say how very charming Mrs. Narracott was, and how very very beautiful.

"That she is, and Montagu is the best fellow in the world, and I am awfully disappointed that they are not staying with me at present."

Well, he was either the greatest hypo-

crite, or the most outrageously brazen-faced fellow that ever lived! That was all they could make out of it, and with such a conclusion they followed Mrs. Pemberton out of the room when she rose and left Sir Everard to the care of her son.

The door was scarcely closed when Delafosse, pouring out a glass of claret, said at once to Pemberton:

"I say, old fellow, I have something to talk to you about. Do you love Miss Swetenham? For whether you do or you don't, *I* do."

He had certainly put his question and made his announcement rather abruptly, and a more collected man than Philip Pemberton might have been pardoned by feeling "struck all of a heap." He coloured and moved in his chair, and stuttered, and really did not know, and swallowed a glass of sherry, did everything in fact but give a direct answer. So Delafosse resumed his straightforward speech.

"Well, I know you love her: who would not? You have known her longest, and her parents, I hear people say, regard you as her probable husband. You are, I believe, in a position to marry, and she is marriageable. What I suggest to you to do, is to propose. I tell you frankly, if you don't, and that very shortly, I shall."

He looked scared and uncomfortable.

"Well—the fact is, Sir Everard—I have been—er—thinking about it some—er—time. Mr. Swetenham has given me, or as much as given me, to understand that—er—that he would be—glad, you know—to see Miss Swetenham married to—er—to—er—me. But, as you ask me one question—only fair, you know, Sir Everard—may I ask you—er—another?"

"Certainly: a dozen."

"Just so. Have you any ground to believe that—er—she—she—you know—cares for—er—you, and that sort of thing?"

"I think she does, but have no right to say so positively."

"Have you—er—said—said, you know—anything to her?"

"Never a word. I have never spoken to her on the subject."

At this Pemberton brightened up.

"All right, then. But—fair play: let us toss!"

Delafosse remembered Champion's advice about the necessity of the other proposing first. But in vain he expressed his readiness, and indeed willingness, to waive any supposed right of equality. The braver fellow would not have it so, and was too chivalrous to take or accept any advantage but such as he had already got. Delafosse urged and begged. No. They must toss. They did so.

"Head!" cried Pemberton.

And "head"—the fates be thanked, thought Sir Everard—it was.

When would he do it? As soon as ever

he could. He should ask Mr. Swetenham for the opportunity, if one did not come of itself. That was his way of going about it; and, circumstanced as he was, of course he was right. Delafosse would keep away from The Slopes meanwhile, and Pemberton would let him know the result as soon as ever he knew it himself.

"Well, Philip dear, what did he want you about?" asked Deborah, as soon as ever the horse's hoofs were heard retreating down the lane.

He told her, and said she might tell Kate, but he must at once go and talk it over with his mother.

After long, and perhaps somewhat monotonous, council, it was decided that they should all walk over to Rymington the following afternoon, and Philip must take heart of courage and decoy Lily aside, and say what he had to say as tenderly, but as bravely, as possible.

"You cannot very well say too much, my

dear boy," admonished his placid parent, who had no doubt whatever about the result, but who, nevertheless, wished that the thing should be done properly. "Girls are girls, Philip, and like to be loved very much; and though they say very little themselves, like to have a great deal said to them. And though the affair is really as good as arranged already, it will be pleasant for you all your life afterwards to look back and be able to recal all the things you said, and how you said them, and to know that you poured out your heart to her, and so moved her into confessing that she loved you. And may God bless you, my dear boy! For if anybody deserves a good wife, I am sure you do."

Miss Deborah, for her part, thought that words were well enough, and she did not mean to say that a man ought not to use them in such abundance as he could muster, but "deeds not words" was her motto, and show her the man who waited years and

years, and never thought of or looked at anybody else but her, and he was the man for her heart. To which description cousin Philip completely answered—she would have liked to say that somebody else, who could be named, did not answer to it at all—and if Lily did not accept him—ay, jump at him—she was not worth having.

Miss Langley did not know about jumping at him. A girl ought not to be too easy, she considered, or cheapen herself out of good nature. But if a man came with no nonsense about him, but said what he wanted, and looked and acted as if he really did want it, why, perhaps, the sooner "Yes" was said, the better for everybody. And "Yes," she hoped, would be Philip's answer that day.

For all which good advice he duly thanked them, but inwardly thought very little about any save that which his dear mother had given him.

Of course they were all bound by the

most solemn promise to say nothing about Sir Everard's intentions. They agreed that proclaiming it would do no good, and both Philip and his mother said it would be to the last degree dishonourable to do so. But there was one little matter about which Deborah was in a terrible fret during the whole of their walk along the little river; and the state of her feelings she confided frankly to her sister.

"I am determined that Lily shall know something about the young authoress who is staying at the cottage. And though I shall be sure to have an opportunity before Sir Everard proposes, in case she refuses Philip —which, of course, I trust she won't—still I should like to tell her before Philip proposes. So that, if she really has the other in her mind at all, I should like her to know how much he can possibly care for her, so that she may set all the higher value on Philip."

"It is a pity, perhaps, that Philip should do it to-day."

"Yes; but what can I do? If I advised him not to be in a hurry, he would answer that he promised Sir Everard to propose as soon as possible; and then he would want to know why I advised him to wait. And if I let out the reason, wouldn't there be a row? I know he would forbid me to breathe a word upon the subject to Lily, and, indeed, threaten never to speak to me again if I did. Men are so absurd, with their ridiculous notions of honour."

Of course it must not be supposed that Miss Deborah, or her sister, or indeed anybody—unless it were Montagu and his wife, who were about as charitable in such matters as Londoners with their experience cannot well help being—imputed, even in thought, to Sir Everard Delafosse, conduct, or even possibility of conduct, which would require a stronger word than "impropriety" to characterise it. But then, with them, impropriety was the gravest sin that ever entered their heads, or came within their

experience; and for want of knowing worse, they probably would, in an excited mood, have gone so far as to call it wickedness. So that, with the important exception of wrongly imagining that he had directly invited Miss Raffles to the cottage, they imputed to him no worse behaviour than we have seen that he was guilty of, of going to see her there. No doubt their ignorance left a good deal open to the imagination; but as their imaginations were very maidenly, he did not suffer much wrong at its hands. And though they were most intimately acquainted with the Old Testament, in which some notable sinners cut rather a prominent figure, still, as Sir Everard was not a scripture personage, they did not connect him in their minds with what they would probably have regarded as supernatural vices.

"But," answered Kate, by way of comfort, "very likely Lily will come up-stairs with us when we arrive, and you can find

an opportunity of giving her a good hint at least of how much he cares for her. You see, if you wait till we put on our bonnets before going away, Philip will already have spoken."

"That's just it," answered Deborah. "However, trust me for doing all that can be done."

But the little schemes of young ladies, even as skilful in proposing them as were undoubtedly Miss Kate and Miss Deborah Langley, are not unoften rudely disposed of by the trifling events which, since they cannot be foreseen, cannot be taken into consultation. Miss Swetenham did not offer to accompany the young ladies up-stairs when they went to take off their things, but went on arranging some out-door ferns which had been sent her, and which, she pleaded, demanded immediate attention. They consoled themselves by the reflection that her remaining so occupied would give Philip his desired opportunity; and they

stayed up-stairs, in consequence, as long as ever they possibly could. On descending, however, they found Lily still busy, and of Philip there was not a trace. He soon emerged from the direction of the stables, in the company of Mr. Swetenham, who had been showing him a new cob which, to listen to their talk, must have had as many "points" as the compass. When the ferns were finally arranged, the fair young gardener said she must have Mrs. Pemberton's opinion about them. Away she ran, seized hold of the old lady, and, despite many attempts at escape and release, retained her bodily for so much of the remainder of the evening as could be spent out of doors. Then Lily was ready enough to go up-stairs, or anywhere Deborah might wish.

"Done anything, Philip?" she contrived to whisper.

"Nothing. No opportunity," he answered.

"Just as well," she rejoined, thereby puzzling him immensely, and setting him off

into all sorts of horrible suspicions for the rest of the evening, not at all to the improvement of his never very brilliant conversation.

What "just as well" meant would have been pretty apparent to him, had he overheard the conversation which, immediately afterwards, took place straight over his head. Deborah was determined that Philip's suit should now be pleaded under every possible advantage, so at once she began.

"We saw Mr. and Mrs. Narracott at Shinglesea, Lily: friends, you know, of Sir Everard. You know them, don't you?"

"Very slightly. We once saw them at The Hold. She is very beautiful."

"Very. She told me such a strange thing about Sir Everard."

"Indeed! What was it?" asked the other, who could not restrain her curiosity, and, indeed, saw no reason for restraining it.

"Why, that a young woman—for lady I cannot call her—an authoress, who wrote

that improper book, 'Head over Heels,' that your mamma sent back to the library, and said was not fit for anybody to read—you remember, don't you, Lily?"

"Not in the least," said Miss Swetenham, quite sure by this time that nothing very pleasant was coming; "I never heard of the book."

"It was so, however. Well, the authoress of this book is staying at a cottage on Sir Everard's estate——"

Miss Swetenham began arranging her hair at another glass. Deborah went on: "And Sir Everard himself asked her there."

"I suppose he has a right to ask whom he pleases."

"A right! No, nobody has a right to do what is wrong."

"I do not see the wrong."

"Not wrong for a man to get a young woman to come, without anybody but a servant, and live close to him, and to go and

see her as often as ever he likes. *I* call it wrong, and highly improper, too."

"But how do you know he goes to see her?"

"How do I know it? Why, Lily, that's absurd. If he does not go to see her, why did he ask her to go there?"

To this remorseless feminine logic, Miss Swetenham could only reply with the equally feminine rejoinder:

"I do not believe a word of it."

"I don't know who it is whom you don't believe, Lily," said the other with a tone of injured innocence; "whether it is Mrs. Narracott or me. In either case it is not very polite."

"Of course I did not mean that I do not believe *you*, Deborah; you know that well enough. Nor need it follow that I do not believe Mrs. Narracott; though, whether I believe it or not, I think it rather strange she should go about spreading such reports

of her friend, particularly one whose hospitality she has received."

"But she will not receive it again. He had the impudence to ask them to stay with him. As if they would go whilst *she* was in the neighbourhood; she whose acquaintance he had made at their very house in London."

"She cannot be anything very dreadful, then."

"She may be, and her conduct proves that she is. Mr. Narracott's position forces him to know all sorts of queer people. And I really did not think you would defend either her or Sir Everard, for what seems to me indefensible."

"I am defending nobody," said Miss Swetenham, with an air of real or well-assumed indifference.

"But what do you think of it?" asked persistent Deborah.

"I do not see that I am called upon to give an opinion."

"Well, I think it's disgraceful. But I suppose it all comes of imitating foreign manners."

"Deborah!" said Lily, all at once reddening and firing up, "I don't know if you say all this to annoy me. It would seem as if you did. And——"

"*Are* you annoyed?" asked the other naïvely.

"Yes, I am, and should be ashamed of myself if I were not. I do not care to hear my friends abused behind their backs."

"I am not abusing anybody; I am only——"

"I think we have had enough of it," said the young lady of the house, recovering her dignity and self-possession. "If you are ready, we will go down stairs."

Down they went, and the remainder of the evening was passed rather unsuccessfully. For the first time ever known, Lily made excuses when asked to sing. Philip was both silent and absent; and had it not

been for the rattle of the dice on the back-gammon board, there would scarce have been any noise at all.

"If you had only seen how angry she was!" said Deborah to her sister, as they walked home. "She coloured up, and took up the cudgels for him as long as ever she could; and when she could do so no longer, she said she had had quite enough, and we had better go down stairs. I should think she had had enough, and rather more than enough. I was determined that she should know all about it. So that if she wants to marry him, she will marry him now with her eyes wide open."

"Marry him, Deborah! How you do jump at conclusions. He has paid her a certain amount of attention when he has happened to see her, and so her vanity has been flattered, and she does not like to hear anything said against him."

"Yes, but you see that his attention did

mean something, and she very probably knows as much. I wish Philip had not been so hasty in agreeing to what Sir Everard proposed."

"I don't see how any harm can be done. Philip proposes first, and if she accepts him, there's an end of the matter. If she does not, it is scarcely likely that she would have been induced to accept him any the more if he had proposed second, or never proposed at all.

This was such a tremendous reduction to absurdity, that Deborah for once gave in. Meanwhile Philip was lamenting to his mother, who hung on to his arm, his ill luck at not having had a chance of being alone with Lily for a single moment. The old lady was, as usual, gentleness itself with him, and let not one word fall that might aggravate the disappointment and excited feelings under which she clearly perceived that he laboured.

"Never mind, my dear boy; there is no occasion for any such hurry. You only promised Sir Everard to speak as soon as you conveniently could, and I am sure that neither he nor anybody else would ever imagine that you did not keep your promises most strictly. But perhaps the best way will be for you to go over alone some day, if necessary, and ask Mr. or Mrs. Swetenham to give you the opportunity of saying what you want to say, and then it will be settled."

Sir Everard, meanwhile, was occupying the interval of waiting, and fortifying his daily-diminishing patience, by the close prosecution of his studies, and employing his pen upon the effort to make clearer to himself the influence of women upon Art. But an Englishman at least, however industrious and persistent, cannot sit before an inkstand or an open volume all day long; and it must be confessed that when, emancipated from these and strolling over his estate, or riding through the more distant woodland, he could

not prevent himself from speculating on what a few more days might bring. He could not think that Lily would at present, under whatever pressure, lend a favourable ear to Philip Pemberton's suit; and in this belief he was strengthened more by the brief but rather startling conversation held under the weeping-ash, than by the silently-acted tenderness which had, on the self-same evening, succeeded it. To marry her quiet, and—without at all wronging him—not intellectual neighbour, would be only a tightening of the narrow home bonds, which, she had let out to him, she felt to be much too tight already. It would be permanently to rivet social fetters which, she had betrayed, even now too deeply galled her. But when he asked himself the further question whether, supposing that she sent Pemberton empty away, she would bestow her good things upon himself, then it was that the recollection of the touch of tender palms acted upon his mind with an argument forcibly in favour of what he

was but too anxious to believe. Nor did he altogether put out of sight the fact that, of all Miss Swetenham's acquaintances, he was the most likely, if not the only, person who, in the character of husband, could extend for her the horizon of life which she evidently chafed to find perpetually so near. On the whole, then, without allowing his wishes to father his thoughts more than he could possibly help, he could not resist the conclusion that his chances with the maiden were tolerably good.

But here, in equal honesty, he was compelled to avow that the odds in his favour entirely ceased. It was not only that Mr. and Mrs. Swetenham favoured Pemberton's suit, but that they would most certainly be unfavourably disposed towards his. How far they were right in being actuated by such sentiments it would have done him no good to inquire, and is a controversial question about which we also need not concern ourselves here. Sufficient is it for us pass-

ingly to note that their harbouring of them not only should not cause surprise, but that on the whole it was much to their credit that it was possible for the question to be raised at all. They were orthodox, reverential, uninquiring, home-keeping, steady-going people, descended from English folk of much the same quality as themselves, and so well endowed by fortune as to be prevented from having the chance of their inferiority—if inferior they were—in some particulars, ever being brought home to them. Without having a tinge of pharisaism, and, indeed, whilst being as humble as it is possible in England for respectable people to be, they could not help vaguely feeling, however much they might strive to repress any assertion, that they were among the just. It is difficult—indeed, is it not impossible?—for a clergyman and his wife, of an Established Church, who have a good living in a beautiful country parish, more than a competency of their own, a lovely daughter, and for them-

selves the respectful admiration of the entire neighbourhood, not to live under the comfortable consciousness that they belong to a chosen people. And with this, so to speak, unconscious consciousness ever about them and at their side, to modify if not indeed to mould all their judgments, what other could be their opinion about one who was neither home-keeping, nor orthodox, nor uninquiring, nor the steady-going descendant of steady-going sires, than that he was manifestly neither among the just nor the chosen? Shall we not extend rather our esteem than our blame to a clergyman who admitted into his drawing-room a man whom he never saw within his chancel, and almost as much to his untravelled spouse, who welcomed to her English hearth the feet that had spent nearly all their life in tramping up and down upon a foreign shore? Remember, they were Children of the Time; in physical condition, of its highest type; in mental, of a type considerably above the average; and in moral

condition, probably but one degree removed from its very highest of all.

But however lastingly agreeable speculation may be upon subjects which can never be solved, upon practical ones whose solution does not depend upon it in the least, it soon grows not only wearisome but irritating. Four, five, six days passed away, and still Sir Everard heard nothing from Pemberton. He had now stayed away from The Slopes for three weeks, a fortnight awaiting the other's return from the sea-side, and the last week in expectation of hearing the result of his formal offer. Champion, of whom he had seen but little these last few days, and who now seemed entirely devoted to horseback and idleness, said at last that it was really desirable that something should be done, and that he should advise Delafosse to look up Pemberton and see if anything had occurred. Sir Everard himself, in addition to his own natural impatience, began to feel that it was really high time, to say the least, that he